

Educational Psychology Service

# Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)



Guidance for Schools

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West Berkshire  
COUNCIL



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“Whilst many children and young people have been relieved to return to school, this has been difficult for some.”



## Introduction

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is one of a range of terms used to describe incidences whereby children and young people (CYP) find it difficult to attend school for emotional reasons. There are a range of factors that can lead to EBSA, with certain risk and resilience factors contributing towards it being more or less likely that an individual may experience this in their school career. It is an important issue: EBSA is known to be associated with poorer long term outcomes for CYP including, for example, fewer employment opportunities, and increased difficulties with mental health and wellbeing in adulthood. It is understood that approximately 1-2% of school pupils experience EBSA during their time in school.

In March 2020 we found ourselves responding to what has been an unprecedented period of school closures due to the global Covid-19 pandemic. CYP were, in most cases, out of school for several months – and where they did attend, school life was very different. Autumn 2020 started with a period of adjustment: with all pupils returning to school and Headteachers and school staff have worked tirelessly to embrace this ‘new normal’ to keep everyone safe. Whilst many CYP have been relieved to return to school, this has been difficult for some. Ongoing uncertainties as the year progresses may further heighten anxieties, leading to an increase in the number of EBSA cases and it is important that we are prepared for this.

Supporting CYP who are experiencing EBSA can feel daunting. There can be competing pressures associated with supporting a return to school for school staff, families and any others who may be involved. Stress levels for CYP and their families may be high. This Guidance aims to deepen your understanding of EBSA, whilst also outlining a psychologically informed practical approach to supporting affected families. As well as providing guidance relating to CYP experiencing long term or ongoing EBSA, it is hoped that it will facilitate early intervention, when individuals are first beginning to experience difficult feelings about school. This approach is based upon the graduated response – the Assess, Plan, Do, Review Cycle, and as such we hope that it is easy to follow and implement. In the Appendices you will find a range of templates that can be used when supporting CYP affected by EBSA, as well as some additional information and simple help sheets for key individuals involved.

### Point of reference

West Berkshire has adopted Therapeutic Thinking as its approach to supporting all CYP. Through a shared ethos across our inclusive authority, we aim to address the individual needs of those who experience uncomfortable, ‘anti-social’ feelings including those that lead to difficult or dangerous behaviours. In West Berkshire, to work therapeutically is to:

*approach behaviour in a way that prioritises the prosocial feelings of everyone in the dynamic (Wadham, 2020)*



The above definition, and Therapeutic Thinking approaches, have been used throughout this Guidance to frame thinking about EBSA.



## Quick read: Supporting children and young people experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance

### Introduction

The following pages provide a brief summary of some of the current research regarding Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). An overview of the West Berkshire recommended approach to supporting children and young people (CYP) experiencing EBSA is then presented. This approach is underpinned by Therapeutic Thinking. Please see the full EBSA Guidance document for further detail, and for resources designed to support CYP and schools whereby EBSA is being experienced.

### The current research

West Berkshire have adopted the term EBSA to describe the instances where CYP experience negative emotions either in school, or at the prospect of going to school. These negative emotions have the potential to impact upon their attendance. It should be noted that EBSA is different from truancy, and from parentally condoned absences.

EBSA can affect long term prospects for CYP in many ways, with the following experiences to be found to have a higher than average prevalence in the EBSA population:

- Reduced access to, or engagement with education, employment or training post compulsory schooling
- Increased risk of lower socio-economic status in the future
- Poorer mental health in childhood, adolescence and adulthood
- Impaired social functioning
- Increased levels of risky behaviours

It is difficult to know the exact number of CYP experiencing EBSA as presentation varies from one pupil to another. Figures increase/decrease according to the range of behaviours that are classified (or not) as indicative of EBSA.

West Berkshire considers EBSA behaviours as falling on a continuum:

Level one	Level two	Level three	Level four
The CYP has been attending school but shows occasional reluctance to attend and/or is anxious about attending school.	The CYP has been attending school but they are experiencing high levels of anxiety. Parents express that they can appear reluctant to attend school. Occasional absences may occur.	The CYP displays periods of sporadic absence which are increasing. Patterns may be found within these periods of non-attendance. Reluctance to attend school is noted by parents.	The CYP is absent from school over an extended period of time. They are reluctant to attend school and their negative feelings about school can feel strong and intense.

Thambirajah et al. (2008); adapted from Derbyshire Educational Psychology Service (2020)

There can be a range of functions of EBSA behaviours including:

- Enabling certain aspects of school to be avoided
- Enabling escape from uncomfortable social situations
- Reducing upset at separation from parents and carers
- Increasing access to tangible rewards or enjoyable activities



In addition, there are a wide host of factors that make CYP more susceptible to EBSA, or which can protect them from it. These can be considered in terms of factors related specifically to:

- CYP themselves (e.g. mental health, temperament and social skills)
- Family/home situation (e.g. parental health, family dynamics and family stressors)
- School factors (e.g. travel to school, subject specific difficulties and the school environment).

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that some CYP are facing heightened challenges.

In the following section, the West Berkshire approach to supporting CYP experiencing EBSA will be described. This is underpinned by our shared understanding of Therapeutic Thinking, and by the following key principles:

### *Early identification and intervention*

The sooner we identify individuals experiencing EBSA, and are able to put into place appropriate support, the greater the likelihood of success. Unrecognised and unsupported, behaviours can become more entrenched, and harder to change.

### *CYP voice*

Genuinely listening to CYP, and working to understand their perspectives, is fundamental to creating plans for support which are most likely to be effective. There are a variety of ways to elicit the views of CYP.

### *Plans which support and involve CYP, families and school*

Plans to support CYP should involve families, schools, and other professionals involved in supporting the CYP. Of course, the affected CYP should be at the centre of support plans.

### *Whole school approaches*

When planning support, schools will need to think more broadly than simply considering the individual CYP: school social, emotional and physical environments will also need to be appraised. Therapeutic Thinking is a key consideration when exploring how a school environment could be developed to support CYP experiencing EBSA.

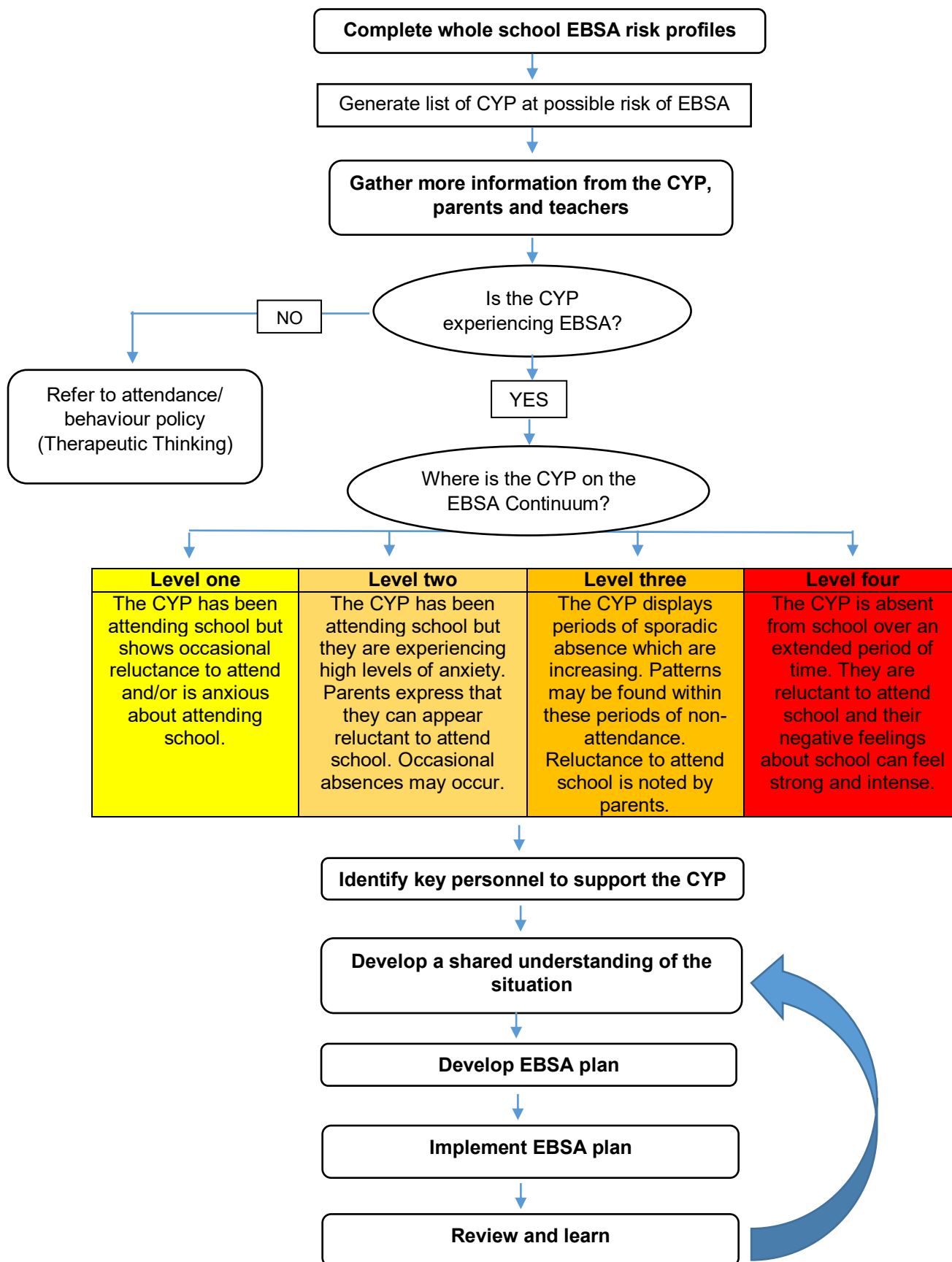
### *Flexible responses*

It is important to hold in mind that there is no 'one size fits all' response to EBSA. CYP will need different types of support, and this support will need to be reviewed and adapted accordingly. What may work for a CYP at one time will not necessarily be effective at another time. Flexibility is key.



## The West Berkshire approach to EBSA

The following flowchart presents the key stages in West Berkshire's recommended approach for schools supporting CYP experiencing EBSA.





## Summary of the West Berkshire approach to EBSA

A brief overview of the steps indicated within the EBSA flowchart, and resources which may be helpful, is here provided:

Assess, Plan, Do, Review	Step	Summary	Useful resources
<b>Assess</b>	<b>One:</b> Complete whole school EBSA risk profiles	This step is about recognising who might be at risk from developing EBSA feelings and behaviours. It involves using an auditing tool to identify risks and protective factors, and to think about the very earliest interventions that may support affected CYP.	Profile of Risk of EBSA (Appendix A)
	<b>Two:</b> Gather more information from CYP, parents and teachers	Where CYP have been identified as at risk of EBSA (or where EBSA is believed to be occurring), it is time to find out more. Speak to the affected CYP, as well as those that know them well at home and in school. You're aiming to get a clearer understanding of the background of the CYP and of any factors that are affecting their experience of school currently: the scope is broad. This stage should enable you to identify whether it is, indeed EBSA, or whether another descriptor may better fit the behaviours.	Person-centred tools (Appendices B-E)  Tips for parents, teachers and CYP (Appendices F-I)
<b>Plan</b>	<b>Three:</b> Identify key personnel to support CYP	Thinking about the needs of the CYP, as identified in step two, you will need to think about who may be best to include in a support team.	See EBSA Guidance for information on roles of teams
	<b>Four:</b> Develop a shared understanding of the situation	Bring together all of the relevant team members, including the CYP and their family. Share the information gathered so that all are clear on the push/pull factors, function of the behaviour, maintenance factors, what is currently working well, and where further support is needed.	Various tools – see info on developing a P.A.T.H. for example
	<b>Five:</b> Develop EBSA Plan	A co-produced bespoke plan should be created, taking into account all of the information and perspectives gathered. This plan should be flexible and gradual.	EBSA Therapeutic Plan (Appendix J) Therapeutic Thinking Risk Reduction and Predict and Prevent Plans
<b>Do</b>	<b>Six:</b> Implement EBSA Plan	Put in place the actions identified in the plan. A flexible approach, which allows for adjustments and setbacks, is essential. It is important that all involved work together to support the affected CYP. Ensure that support is in place for the family as well as the CYP. Increases in expectation should be gradual.	EBSA Plans as above (Appendix J)



<b>Review</b>	<b>Seven:</b> Review and learn	Involve the CYP and their team in reviewing the plan on a regular basis, with adjustments being made as needed. Celebrate successes no matter how small. It may be helpful to revisit previously used tools and approaches to capture progress.  Review/repeat Step one: Whole school EBSA audits, should be completed at regular intervals in order to highlight any CYP at risk.	EBSA Therapeutic Plan (Appendix J) Therapeutic Thinking Risk Reduction and Predict and Prevent Plans
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Within the Appendices you will find a number of other tools and resources which will help you in supporting CYP where EBSA is being experienced. These include:

- Guides for children, young people and parents in managing anxiety
- Top tips for teachers who may have a pupil experiencing EBSA in their class
- A host of questions that may be helpful in finding out more information.

Furthermore, the Guidance contains much more detailed explanations of each of the stages of this flowchart, and of the colleagues who may be able to support you at each stage.







## Section One: Background and research

This section of the guidance aims to provide a theoretical overview of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) and is based upon the current research in the field.

### Defining EBSA

A plethora of terms are used to describe school non-attendance behaviours (e.g. 'school avoidance' and 'school refusal'). These terms can have different connotations in respect of the level of control they suggest the individual may have in relation to their non-attendance, and the reasons behind their non-attendance. The term EBSA is adopted by WBEPS as it captures the emotional aspect that embodies the experiences of CYP who are currently feeling unable to attend school. This aligns with a therapeutic view that difficult, anti-social experiences and feelings lead to both internalising and externalising behaviours (which could include avoidance of school).

This view is supported by the research. For example, Egger, Costello and Angold (2003) found that in EBSA cases CYP experience negative emotions (which can be intense) when in school, or at the prospect of attending school. These feelings may be in contrast to their wishes (they may actually want to be in school), and can be overwhelming. Avoidance of school becomes a way of managing these difficult feelings.

CYP experiencing EBSA are typically found to internalise their anti-social or difficult feelings (experiencing worry, self-doubt or embarrassment, for example) rather than display their feelings through external behaviours (e.g. being disruptive in class or rude to teachers; (Knollmann et al., 2013)). Therefore, because CYP experiencing EBSA often have their anti-social and uncomfortable feelings hidden away, it can be difficult to recognise their needs and put in place support measures before thought patterns, and behaviours, become more entrenched. However, it should be noted that, as negative feelings about school increase, CYP who don't normally externalise their feelings may do so (for example, in a desperate attempt to avoid school or gain control of a situation (Thambirajah et al., 2008)).

Furthermore it is important to note the distinction between EBSA and other types of persistent absence such as truancy, and parentally condoned absences. See table below.

**Please note, the word 'parent(s)' is used in this document to refer to parents, guardians and carers who have parental responsibility for the child or young person.**

EBSA	Truancy	Parentally condoned absence
CYP absence from school that is driven by the negative emotions experienced when in school, or at the thought of going to school. Parents are generally aware of their child's absence and are working to support a return to school.	CYP absence from school is motivated by a milder dislike of school or by the potential to pursue more pleasurable activities outside of school, or tangible rewards (e.g. spending time with a friend or playing computer games). Neither parents nor school have given permission for the absence and parents may not be aware.	School absence which is known about and accepted by parents (perhaps due to their own ambivalent feelings about school), or which may be encouraged by parents who wish to have their child at home for their own benefit (Gallé-Tessonneau and Heyne, 2020).

Thambirajah et al. (2008)



### Prevalence

School attendance has been a longstanding concern for successive UK governments, leading to a range of policies and initiatives aimed at increasing the amount of time CYP spend in class.

The prevalence of EBSA in the UK is hard to establish for a number of reasons including:

- The difficulties in defining EBSA and arriving at agreed terminology.
- The challenges in identifying if behaviour would come under the category of EBSA or, for example, another form of persistent absence (e.g. truancy).
- The difficulties in recognising EBSA, particularly in its earlier stages, in individuals. Gallé-Tessonneau and Heyne (2020) highlight that a ‘one size fits all’ description of EBSA is unhelpful: signs and behaviours are different in the individuals affected and so it may not always be obvious or easy to establish what is happening for individuals and whether it can be identified as EBSA, or not.

Furthermore, EBSA can also be thought of as reflecting a spectrum of behaviours and presentations (e.g. Beckles, 2014). Therefore, in establishing prevalence one would need to consider the number of CYP affected at different points on the continuum.

The EBSA Continuum can act as a broad guide for identifying EBSA behaviours:

Level one	Level two	Level three	Level four
The CYP has been attending school but shows occasional reluctance to attend and/or is anxious about attending school.	The CYP has been attending school but they are experiencing high levels of anxiety. Parents express that they can appear reluctant to attend school. Occasional absences may occur.	The CYP displays periods of sporadic absence which are increasing. Patterns may be found within these periods of non-attendance. Reluctance to attend school is noted by parents.	The CYP is absent from school over an extended period of time. They are reluctant to attend school and their negative feelings about school can feel strong and intense.

Thambirajah et al. (2008); adapted from Derbyshire Educational Psychology Service (2020)

As an approximation, in 1999, Elliot estimated that in the region of 2% of CYP may experience behaviours describable as EBSA during their school career. There is no known difference between males and females (King and Bernstein, 2001), though the prevalence is felt to be slightly higher in secondary schools (Elliot, 1999).

Government data indicates that 13.14% of pupils, in state funded primary, secondary and special schools, had missed ten or more school sessions over the Autumn term 2019-2020. This was an increase from 10.9% in the same period during the 2018-2019 academic year, though the increase was felt to reflect seasonal illnesses during the period (GOV.UK, 2020).

The onset of EBSA can be gradual, with patterns of behaviour emerging over a number of months, or can be sudden (West Sussex EPS, 2018).



## The impact of EBSA

Le Riche (1995) notes that school attendance has been mandatory in the UK since 1906 with the importance of a formal education, leading to academic qualifications, heralded alongside a need for school to prepare CYP for their adult lives. It therefore goes without saying that missing extended periods of school is likely to have a negative effect on CYP.

In addition to missing opportunities to learn foundational knowledge, functional skills and to achieve qualifications to support future careers, research shows that CYP who experience EBSA:

- Find it harder to access education, employment or training post compulsory education (Taylor, 2012): it is difficult to 'catch up' once school has been missed.
- Face a higher risk of future unemployment (Kearney et al., 2001).
- Are at risk of lower socio-economic status in adulthood (DfE, 2012).
- May be at higher risk of experiencing poor mental health in childhood, as adolescents and as adults (Kearney, 2008; Lyon and Cotler, 2007).
- Experience impaired social functioning, and social exclusion in adulthood (DfE, 2012), as well as potentially negative impacts on marital relationships (e.g. Brandibas et al., 2004) and family relationships (e.g. Christogiorgos and Giannakopoulos, 2014).
- Lastly Kearney (2008) notes a correlation between EBSA and increased levels of risky behaviours such as suicide attempts, substance misuse and teenage sexual activity.

## Functions of EBSA

Research has also considered why EBSA occurs – what are the factors that lead an individual to feeling unable to attend school? Study findings, which over the years have considered the perspectives of CYPs, families and schools, have identified several factors. Reviewing the current research, it is felt that Kearney and Silverman's (1990) summary of these factors remains relevant. They note that EBSA may serve the functions of:

1. Enabling CYP to avoid something/a situation that causes them to experience a high level of stress or negative, anti-social feelings (e.g. assemblies, exams, the school canteen).
2. Enabling CYP to escape social situations that they find difficult (e.g. giving presentations).
3. Reducing experiences of separation anxiety, or gaining attention from loved ones.
4. Enabling them to pursue activities they find more motivating outside of school (e.g. playing computer games, going out).

In relation to the pursuit of tangible rewards such as playing computer games, it is noted that this behaviour is often associated more so with truancy. However, taking part in enjoyable activities can be implicated in the maintenance of a pattern of EBSA.

Heyne, Sauter and Maynard (2015) found that, of their study participants, approximately 50% of CYP experienced a diagnosed anxiety disorder. They note, however, that other mental ill health diagnoses were not considered.

Kearney and Silberman (1990) note that, in considering how to respond to EBSA, one must consider the function of the behaviour. For example, whilst cognitive behavioural approaches may be appropriate in relation to cases where anxiety is a central factor, they are unlikely to be as effective in cases where CYP are seeking attention from family members.



**Why are some children more susceptible to EBSA?**

Firstly, research indicates the importance of avoiding considering EBSA from a ‘within-child’ perspective. In order to fully understand and respond to EBSA, one needs instead to think systemically and from an interactionist perspective (Gregory and Purcell, 2014). What factors are there within the CYP’s environment and how do they interact with these?

It can therefore be helpful to appraise a situation by thinking about factors relating to the child which impact the way they view their world, alongside family and school factors that may have a bearing on their emotional experience. In the table below, some sample factors are presented.

<b>CYP factors</b>	<b>Family/home factors</b>	<b>School factors</b>
Experiencing symptoms of anxiety and/or depression	Parents needing more support	Experiencing bullying
Temperament (e.g. introversion/extroversion)	Poor parental physical or mental health	Finding a particular subject difficult or having difficulties in other ways with a particular lesson
Low self-efficacy and poor problem solving skills	Being a young carer	Transition across key stages or between schools
Difficulties with social communication and interaction	Changes to family dynamics (e.g. separation/divorce)	Travel to school
Low educational attainment	Parental overprotection	Assessments
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)	Dysfunctional family relationships	Difficult friendships or relationships with adults
Developmental disorders (e.g. Autism)	Loss and bereavement	School routines/structures
Physical illnesses	Stress within the family	
Difficulties separating from parents	Lack of confidence in maintaining consistent routines or with parenting	
Adverse Childhood Experiences (trauma)		
Sensory processing differences		

See Ingul, Havik and Heyne (2019) and West Sussex EPS (2018) for more details.

King and Bernstein (2001) and Derbyshire EPS (2020) note that transition points (i.e. between schools or phases) can present as a higher risk time for the onset of EBSA.

Of these identified risk factors, further detail is given below in relation to CYP factors (autism as a developmental condition, social communication difficulties and temperament: introversion/extroversion), family factors (responses to stress: Covid-19), and school factors (transitions).



## CYP risk factors

### Autism and social communication difficulties

As noted above, developmental disorders including autism and social communication difficulties can be a risk factor for EBSA. It is widely accepted that anxiety can often be experienced alongside autism (e.g. National Autistic Society, 2020a), and therefore we may expect that CYP with autism can experience higher levels of anxiety in relation to attending school, and the challenges it raises – meaning that they could be more prone to finding it emotionally difficult to attend school. However, if we look more closely at some of the particular challenges faced by CYP with autism, we can more fully understand their experiences, and how we may support them.

- *Sensory processing*: CYP with autism often experience sensory information in different ways to their peers. They may be over or under sensitive to certain factors. This can mean that some environments or situations in school can be overpowering and very uncomfortable (e.g. the sound of a pen on the whiteboard, the smell of school dinners being prepared). We may not always know all of the factors that affect CYP, and how they are feeling (National Autistic Society, 2020b).
- *Processing language*: It can be harder for CYP with autism to understand what others may be saying. It may be that the language being used is too complex, the speaker is speaking too quickly, or that they aren't being given adequate time to think about and plan their responses. Complex language such as sarcasm or idioms can be difficult to comprehend, and language may be interpreted literally. Difficulties in understanding language can make it very challenging to understand and feel comfortable in one's environment (National Autistic Society, 2020c).
- *Understanding social situations*: CYP with autism can sometimes experience what is described as 'context blindness' whereby they find it difficult to perceive different contexts and how social rules vary according to the different situations they find themselves in. For example, they may speak to the school head teacher in the same way that they talk to their peers, or may behave as if they are at home, seemingly not noticing the need to behave differently in school. Reprimands (or perhaps odd looks from others) can then be very confusing (National Autistic Society, 2020c).
- *Understanding the thoughts of others*: We may be familiar with the term 'theory of mind', but it can be harder to understand what this looks like in practice. CYP with autism can find it difficult to: recognise facial expressions and body language, view a situation from another's perspective, or step aside from the particular detail of a situation that is most pertinent to them. This can all make it very challenging to predict or understand what is happening in different social situations, and to understand what others may be expecting of you (Brewer, Young and Barnett, 2017).
- *Rigidity/inflexibility of thinking*: CYP who experience autism can find it difficult to consider alternative approaches or ways of thinking about situations, routines and behaviours (D'Cruz et al., 2013). This means they can find it difficult to accept factors such as room or staff changes, or times where they are off their normal curriculum timetable. School life, whilst largely routine based, can bring times where CYP need to adjust their thinking and approach. This can be very difficult for some, and can lead to increased levels of anxiety or negative emotions.



These are a few examples of some of the challenges CYP with autism may face in school, though this list is far from exhaustive.

In addition, it should be noted that, although they may not have a diagnosis of autism, there is a large cohort of CYP who experience social communication difficulties, which may be characterised by some of the above challenges, who are also at a greater risk of EBSA. These difficulties, or differences in how social information is understood, can make school life very challenging for this population to navigate, and can lead to anti-social feelings.

It therefore follows that, where autism or social communication difficulties are a known factor, one may need to be particularly astute to indicators that anti-social feelings are experienced in relation to school, and of the heightened risk of EBSA.

However, it should be noted that autism and social communication difficulties are not always diagnosed. CYP may have developed sophisticated ways of coping and appearing to manage in their environment. Whilst these strategies may have carried them so far through school, as the social environment becomes more sophisticated it may be that they start to become overwhelmed. It can be exhausting, stressful, and can lead to a rise in anxiety symptoms for these CYP. Therefore, in addition to EBSA cases where autism or social communication difficulties are known about, it can be helpful to explore how individuals experience their social environment in other cases too.

### **Temperament: Introversión vs. extroversión**

Introverts typically prefer their own company and may not always feel comfortable in social arenas or situations where there is a potential need for them to socially perform. Extroverts, by contrast, thrive in social environments and enjoy being around others. In considering CYP who may be experiencing EBSA, Therapeutic Thinking encourages, in addition to other assessments and factors that may be impacting on how CYP are feeling, an exploration of whereabouts the individual sits on an introversion/extroversion continuum. Therefore, one needs to consider how the school environment, which may be viewed as extrovertly framed in its customs and practices, is experienced by individuals. Would an environment which favours a more introvert perspective feel more comfortable for CYP?

## **Family/home factors**

### **Stress within the family home**

All families experience stress. This may be occasional and relate to specific situations or circumstances that occur, or may be ongoing spanning a number of years (for example in relation to housing or economic factors). Families vary also in their coping mechanisms and ability to bounce back after periods of stress. What may be highly stressful to one family may feel manageable to another, and vice versa. When supporting in cases where EBSA is a factor, we need to be mindful of our own understanding of what is stressful. We may perceive that a family 'can' or 'should' be able to cope with the stressors they experience, but this may be based on our own coping mechanisms, disregarding the starting point of the family in question.

In addition it must be noted that all families and homes have likely experienced considerably elevated levels of stress (at least at times) over the period of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the time of writing, this pandemic is ongoing. For a prolonged period of time, families will have been trying their best to support their CYP in very challenging and exceptional circumstances. Families will have been differentially resourced in terms of a range of factors such as managing on reduced income, providing home schooling and managing in difficult



conditions (e.g. limited space or lack of access to outdoor space). We may not know about all of the health factors that have affected families over this period of time. We also do not know the degree to which families have had effective support or coping strategies to help them weather these difficult times.

Therefore we need to be mindful of the fact that households who previously appeared to cope well with day to day life may have been stretched further than ever before by their lockdown and pandemic experiences. This may be a risk factor that needs to be assessed anew, so that it may accurately correspond with their experiences during the pandemic.

## School factors

### Transitions

As noted above, transition points between schools and phases can be a risky time for CYP in terms of EBSA (King and Bernstein, 2001; Derbyshire Educational Psychology Service, 2020). At such times, the school life of CYP can feel turned upside down: new teachers, new classmates, new routines and expectations - and potentially a new school building (with associated changes to travel, home routines etc.). The strategies that previously worked for them and enabled them to cope with school life may no longer be possible or practicable. For those CYP who were just about managing, this could prove too much, and EBSA behaviours may begin to emerge.

During the pandemic there was a period of school closures and those CYP who were attending would have experienced school as they never knew it before: different groupings, teaching staff, work expectations and rules. For those CYP learning at home, there will have been considerable differences in their experiences over this time: from a full education programme supported by parents able to home school, through to little or even no access to education. Routines will have been very different to school. And for some, where school may previously have been a protective factor in otherwise challenging lives, they will have had prolonged exposure to possible risk factors at home (e.g. family discord or inadequate living circumstances).

In our planning and support, we need to be particularly attuned to CYP for whom risk factors for EBSA have dramatically increased over the pandemic, or in cases where we know that pre-existing difficulties could potentially have been exacerbated by a period of intermittent school attendance. Some CYP may have felt happier and more relaxed at home with the increased levels of security and reduced social anxieties or thrived using new forms of schooling (online/virtual) so may not have wanted to return to school. Others may have missed out on support or felt the pressures of negative experiences and emotions during time at home. Some may have benefited from the support in smaller 'bubbles' and may not have wanted school to return to 'normal' whilst others may have felt isolated from their peers or worried about upcoming exams. Each set of circumstances will be unique (Daniels et al., 2020).

Nottingham City Educational Psychology Service (2020) used their pupil survey to capture some of the factors affecting CYP as they returned to school in September (please note: different geographical areas will have had their own experiences of Covid-19, as well as individual families and CYP). WBEPS produced a series of Wellbeing and Recovery Guidance documents (2020) to support the transition of CYP back into schools including ways to manage wellbeing at this time.



**What protective factors can reduce the likelihood of EBSA?**

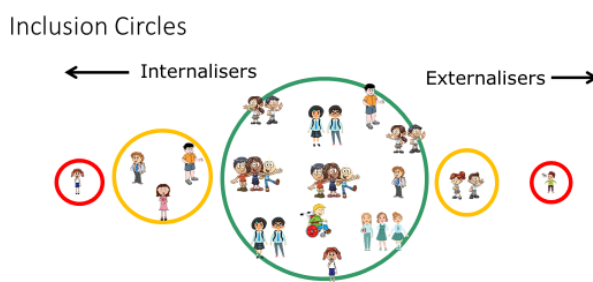
In addition to factors which may increase the risk of EBSA, certain factors are also known to reduce the risk. Example protective factors are presented in the table below, again distinguished by factors relating to the CYP, to the family/home and to school.

<b>CYP factors</b>	<b>Family/home factors</b>	<b>School factors</b>
Temperament	Stable home environments	Well-embedded policies, including a whole school approach, that promotes wellbeing and which enable smooth transitions into and out of the school and across key stages
Good physical and mental health	Secure relationships with caregivers and stable positive family wide relationships	Good relationships with peers and staff
Appropriate communication and social skills	Clear routines and consistent parenting	Having the thinking and learning skills needed to access school tasks
Confidence in own academic ability and skills; not feeling overwhelmingly challenged by school work	Parental support for education	Experiencing a sense of belonging
Experiences of success and achievement	Absence of significant stressors within the family	Effective multi-agency working
Absence of traumatic experiences	Good parental physical and mental health	
Absence of developmental disorders/conditions	Opportunities to take part in sport and leisure activities	

EBSA can be thought of as emerging when the risk factors (that ‘pull’ CYP away from school) outweigh the protective factors (that ‘push’ CYP back into school) (Thambirajah et al., 2008).

**Inclusion Circles**

Holding the host of risk and resilience factors CYP may experience in mind, and when thinking about which pupils in a class may be at greater likelihood of experiencing EBSA, it can be helpful to think of our whole class, and where learners may sit on a safe-unsafe learners’ continuum. The Therapeutic Thinking Inclusion Circles model can support our thinking.



(Wadham, 2020)

As seen above, we have our central group of learners (in the green circle) whom we consider to be ‘safe learners’. These learners may experience some of the risks identified above, but they are supported by a range of protective factors too, meaning that they have enough prosocial experiences to have prosocial feelings – consequently demonstrating prosocial behaviours that are safe for the classroom. Through an EBSA lens, we would consider these learners to be low risk.





Our diagram then indicates that our green circle is flanked by amber and red circles (denoting our 'unsafe learners'). Those CYP in the amber circles are experiencing greater levels of risk factors, and are less supported by protective experiences meaning that their levels of prosocial experiences and behaviours are lower. They may therefore display internalising or externalising behaviours that can be considered difficult, though these may be at a lower level and be primarily disruptive for themselves. These learners are at a greater risk of EBSA.

Thirdly, in our red circles we may find CYP who have the highest degree of anti-social experiences and feelings, coupled with the lowest levels of protective factors. Their externalising and internalising anti-social behaviours are therefore more evident and serious, and may be termed 'dangerous'. This group are again at a greater risk of EBSA.

As noted elsewhere in this summary, whilst we know that CYP who experience EBSA have a greater tendency towards internalising behaviours, externalising behaviours can become more apparent as individuals become more concerned with avoiding or escaping their negative feelings about school (Thambirajah et al., 2008).

Therefore, as we consider our school communities and appraise the level of risk for individual CYP, our Inclusion Circles model can be a useful framework for helping us to think about groups of CYP and which individuals may benefit from earlier intervention or support to protect them against the possibility of EBSA emerging.

### **Responding to EBSA: Key principles**

Supporting CYP experiencing EBSA is noted (Reid, 2006) to often feel complex and difficult to plan and approach. However, the following overarching principles can aid schools in working to support this population.

#### **Whole school approaches**

Research conducted by Beckles (2014) recognised the importance of thinking about EBSA from a whole school perspective. Schools need to consider their social, emotional and physical environments at all levels, appraising the changes that may be needed in order for CYP to feel respected as individuals, valued, and to experience a sense of belonging.

It may be helpful to consider how schools are working therapeutically, using the West Berkshire therapeutic audit tool to appraise attitudes and systems in school. Please contact the Therapeutic Thinking Lead for further information or support with auditing or climate checking your school.

#### **Early identification and intervention**

Research (Reid, 2002) indicates that the sooner we are able to identify individuals experiencing EBSA, and the sooner we are able to put support in place, the greater the likelihood of success. The longer EBSA behaviours occur without recognition and support, the more entrenched they can become. In Therapeutic Thinking terms, the negative anti-social feelings experienced, and behaviours demonstrated, risk becoming the 'default' for CYP, whereas our aim would be to create prosocial default feelings as the base.

In Section Two, we will outline our process for identifying CYP at greater risk of EBSA. You can also find a copy of our suggested tool in the Appendices Section.



West Sussex (2018) note the following possible indicators of emerging EBSA which **schools may find it helpful to look out for:**

- Prolonged or regular absences from school.
- Patterns in absences (e.g. always a Friday, always late on Monday morning).
- Apparent difficulties in morning routines (as described by parents/carers) and/or in separating from parents/carers at school.
- CYP seeming reluctant to leave home.
- CYP voicing concerns about school or stating that they do not want to go.
- Avoidance of school trips.
- Overly worrying about family members.
- Expressing a desire to go on a trip/attend a lesson but then being unable to do so.
- Appearing isolated and seeming to avoid peers.
- Physical complaints/symptoms (e.g. complaining of headaches, feeling sick, weight loss/gain etc.).

In addition to this, **parents may look out for the following example behaviours** displayed at home by their child:

- Crying
- Becoming argumentative or aggressive
- Refusing to get ready for or go to school
- Sleep difficulties
- Pleading with family members
- Experiencing psychosomatic symptoms (e.g. headaches or stomach aches which don't have a medical cause – always check with your GP).

As noted above, CYP experiencing EBSA typically experience higher levels of internalising behaviours as opposed to externalising behaviours. However, their emotional distress may lead to the prevalence of more externalising displays of distress (e.g. becoming verbally/physically challenging), as CYP desperately seek to gain control over the situation and avoid school (Thambirajah et al., 2008).

### Listening to the voice of CYP

Babcock LDP Educational Psychology Service (2016) recognise the importance of genuinely listening to the voice of the CYP affected by EBSA, and using this to inform every step of the action plan to support them. CYP perspectives and opinions should be taken into account, and they should be involved in regularly reviewing their support. Tools to authentically elicit child voice should take into account any learning or communication needs the child may have.

In Section Two and the Appendices, we will describe ways in which CYP views may be authentically sought, and present a range of tools to aid this.

### Plan support to involve CYP, families and school

Elliot and Place (2017) note the importance of responses to EBSA considering support and actions involving family members and school staff. Nuttall and Woods (2013) support this notion, finding that positive relationships between home and school are essential, as is meeting the needs of the family as they work to support their child. The wider school system



and external professionals, are key within this. It should be noted that some families may need ongoing support to develop their confidence in parenting and to implement effective routines to support a return to school.

The current Guidance proposes the use of Therapeutic Plans, based on extensive information gathering, as a useful tool in creating clarity around how CYP will be supported. We have also provided tips and guidance for parents in supporting their children with EBSA. Please see Section Two and the Appendices.

**Flexible responses**

There is no ‘one size fits all’ response to EBSA; support must be planned in accordance with the needs of the individual at the particular time and given their circumstances (Baker and Bishop, 2015). Responses and plans may need to change as time progresses to reflect a changing situation, or what is found to work well/not so well.

**Learnings from local research (2019)**

Thinking more generally about the types of things that help, or do not help, when a CYP is experiencing EBSA, we can consider the local context. Using an interview schedule to explore views, the West Berkshire ASD team created a range of case studies of West Berkshire pupils who have experienced, or who continue to experience, EBSA. These case studies were based upon an interview schedule created by Ruth Moyse and the University of Reading. The factors (not interventions) that have supported them in feeling able to attend school – or that have made school attendance harder, are detailed below:

Things that help	Things that don't help
Access to enjoyable activities in school, and lessons that are interesting	Adjusting to different routines and school life at secondary
Having friends	Homework
A comfortable learning environment (lighting, noise levels etc.). This can be different for different CYP	Uncomfortable environments.
Access to safe spaces	Having to leave a safe space before being ready to
Having good relationships with staff who listen	Difficulties with other CYP and a lack of friendships
Consistency and predictability	Uncomfortable social interactions needed as part of the day
Opportunities to problem solve with support	Too many staff/pupils – the feeling of being in a crowd
Having realistic targets	Other students being too noisy and boisterous
Positive feedback and encouragement	Detentions
	Feeling different to peers through the support provided



Considering the West Berkshire Therapeutic Thinking approach, Nuttall and Woods (2013) note the importance of supporting the development of prosocial feelings such as safety and security, having a sense of belonging, having self-confidence and self-esteem, and feeling motivated for the future.

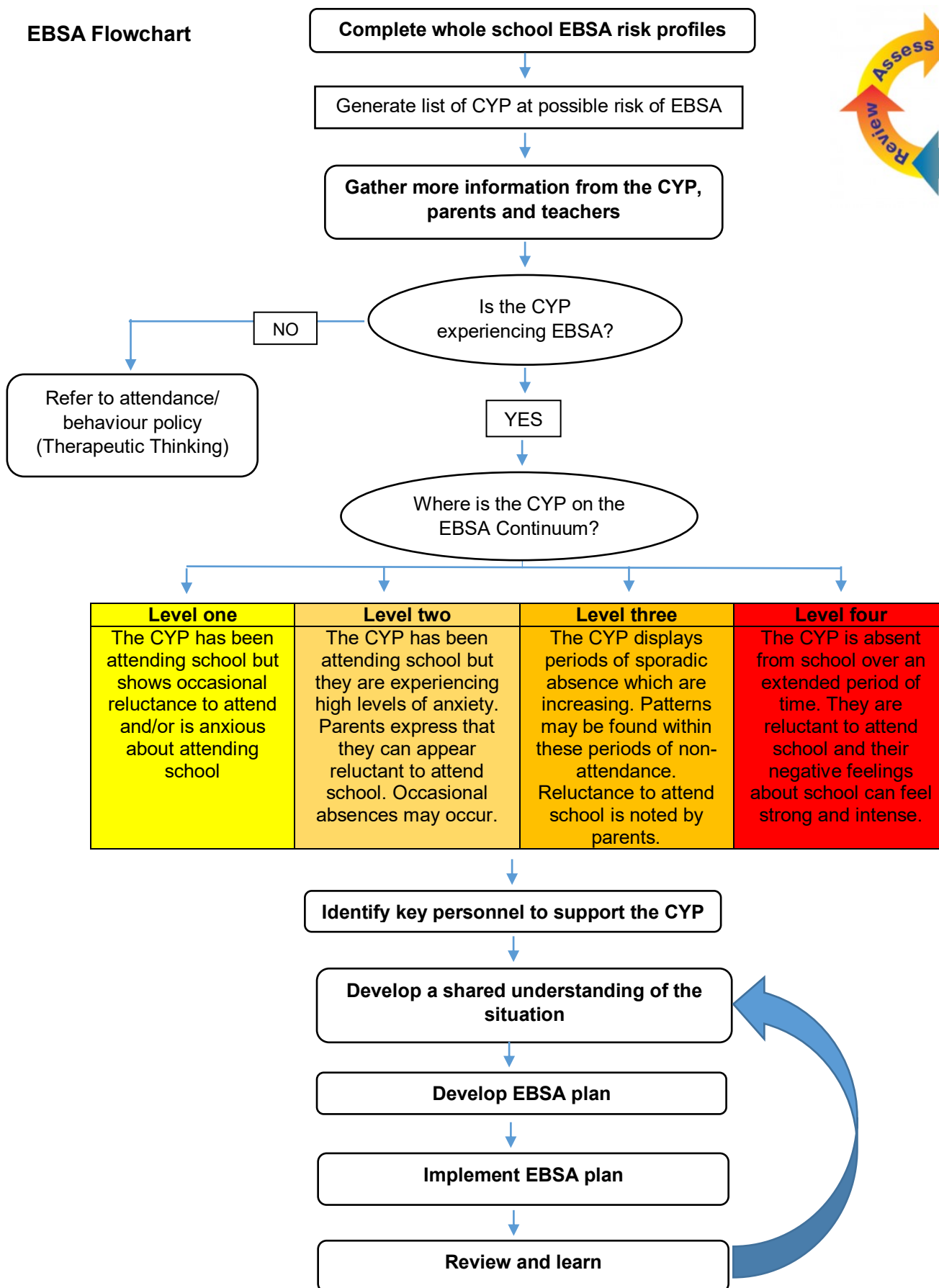
### **What's next?**

In Section Two you will find our easy-to-use flowchart, which demonstrates a graduated approach to supporting CYP affected by EBSA. This flowchart is then broken down, with step-by-step guidance provided to help you to implement each of the stages. Tools and approaches are highlighted along the way.



## Section Two: EBSA flowchart and the graduated approach

### EBSA Flowchart





## EBSA Graduated Response

Having considered the research and theoretical background pertaining to EBSA, Section Two of this Guidance opened by presenting the EBSA Flowchart. We endeavour that this is an easy-to-use tool that will help to guide you through, step-by-step, when supporting CYP affected by EBSA. In the pages that follow, we will explain each of the flowchart stages, describing our recommended approach, and introducing the tools we have designed to help you follow this process. As you will notice reading through, our approach can be mapped against the Assess, Plan, Do, Review Cycle, and should support you in adopting a graduated approach in EBSA cases.

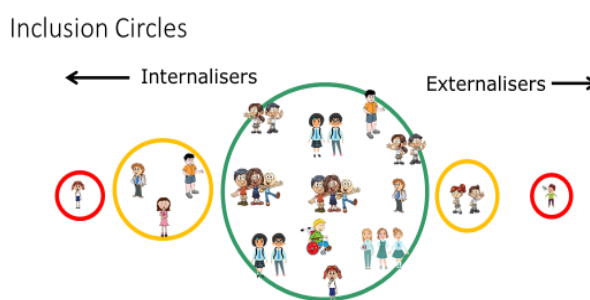


### ASSESS

#### Step one – Complete whole school EBSA risk profiles

By adopting a whole school approach to EBSA, the number of CYP experiencing EBSA will reduce and those at risk of EBSA will be identified before they start to disengage from school. Being able to track the level of risk for each CYP against risk and resilience factors is crucial as the longer the problems remain unaddressed, the poorer the outcome. It should be remembered that everyone has mental health so it may not always be possible to predict who might be affected by those factors alone. CYP experiencing EBSA are typically found to present with higher levels of internalising behaviours than externalising behaviours (see Section One: Background and research for more information) so look out for early warning signs. The key is to monitor non-attendance, work with parents and note any changes in behaviour, some of which may be subtle, before they become entrenched.

Whilst best practice would involve completing EBSA risk profiles for all CYP in a class, it may be helpful to initially focus on those CYP whom are currently felt to be within the amber and red circles on the Therapeutic Thinking Inclusion Circles Model i.e. those CYP identified as ‘unsafe learners’ and at greatest risk of EBSA. Please contact your Link EP or the Therapeutic Thinking Lead for a blank copy of the Inclusion Circles Model if you would like to map your class onto this.



In this difficult period, it will also be important to identify those CYP for whom their risk factors may have changed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of those CYP may already have been identified as ‘unsafe learners’; however, there will also be those who, whilst not previously identified, have now developed anxieties about school. The anxieties faced by these CYP will vary, as noted in the EBSA Background and Research document. Conversely, for some learners, the school closure period and times of isolation may give time and space for risk factors to be resolved and for CYP to move into the safe learners group.

Use the Profile of Risk of EBSA (Appendix A) to assess the level of risk for the CYP in your class/school and use this in conjunction with the Inclusion Circles Model to map the safe and unsafe learners.




**Step two – Gather more information from CYP, parents and teachers**

For those CYP identified at risk of EBSA, it is important to gather further information from the CYP, their parents and teachers to understand the rationale for non-attendance. This will include clarification about whether the CYP is experiencing EBSA in addition to identifying the severity of the school absence and type/severity of the anxiety (Thambirajah et al., 2008). The CYP’s difficulties can then be mapped onto the EBSA Continuum for appropriate plans to be developed. Tips for working with the CYP, parents and teachers are included in this section to help school staff capture as much information as possible to feed in to the information sharing meeting (Step 4).

*Capturing the voice of the CYP, parents and teachers*

**Working with CYP:** Use person-centred tools (Appendix D) to capture the CYP’s views about school. Acknowledge that it can be difficult to talk about school life when this has been a negative experience for them and talking about returning to school may be anxiety-provoking. Encouraging the CYP to share their views, however difficult, will help them to feel involved in this process and reassure them that adults want to listen. Often hearing the voice of the CYP, sometimes for the first time, can help adults to change their perceptions of the difficulties the CYP is facing. Safe starting points can often be to talk about a CYP’s hobbies or interests and things that they think they do well or feel proud of.

Explore thoughts and feelings about school using a range of tools (Appendix D) including one page profiles, feelings cards, scaling and the School Stress Survey. Educational Psychologists can support with additional techniques such as the Drawing the Ideal Self (Moran, 2020) and Ideal Classroom (Morgan-Rose, 2015). A recent extension of this is Drawing the Ideal Safe School (Williams, 2020) which in light of the Covid-19 pandemic helps the CYP to think about what going to a safe school would look like i.e. from getting ready for school through to the physical spaces, teachers, lessons and break times. This has been designed to be used by parents before a CYP returns to school. For more information, please see: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DF9ie2Zr8rG\\_OXxt9pCKKDhqpE2EAmHZ/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DF9ie2Zr8rG_OXxt9pCKKDhqpE2EAmHZ/view)

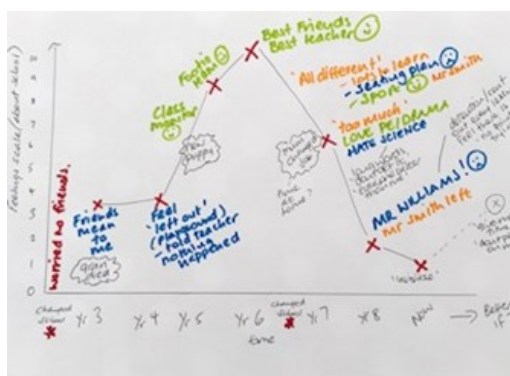
I like...  3 words to describe me... I dislike...

How do you feel about school on a scale of 0-10?  
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I am good at ... I am not so good at ...

Why do you feel this way?  
What would need to happen to increase that number?

Things I would change (if I could) ...



School Stress Survey	I very often or always feel stress at this, I can't cope with it.	I sometimes feel stress, I don't like it but I can cope.	I feel OK about this, I can cope with it easily.
1. Getting Up & Ready			
2. Journey To & From			
3. Assembly			
4. Corridors			
5. Written Work			
6. Break Times			
7. Teacher Q&A			
8. Team / Group Work			
9. Lunch Times			
10. 1 to 1 with Adults			
11. Tests			
12. Homework			



Questions may include:

- What would a perfect day look like?
- How would your friends/parents describe you?
- What are you good at?
- Who is your favourite teacher? Why?
- Tell me about school. What is the building like? What are the teachers like? How are lessons/ subjects / homework?
- What do you do at break and lunch times?
- Do you have friends in school?
- Are there difficult times of the day for you? i.e. arriving/leaving school, break and lunch times, lining up to go into school or class, changing for PE etc.
- Are there particular aspects of class that you find hard i.e. reading aloud, being chosen to answer questions, group work
- If you could change one thing about school (no promises!), what would it be?
- When you have felt like not attending school before what has helped and/or hindered?

*Working with parents:* Positive relationships between school staff and parents are vital. Work with parents (using the questions below and in Appendix C) to understand the drivers of school avoidance. Acknowledge that parents may be going through a challenging time, struggling to know how best to support their son/daughter and/or unknowingly reinforcing their behaviours. Parents themselves may have become anxious during the Covid-19 pandemic and feel reassured by the presence of their children in the home (particularly where they have underlying health conditions). Alternatively, parents may be reliant upon their child to be at home to complete caring or other duties. Whatever the circumstances, collaboration is key. Ensure that parents feel they are being listened to and not judged. Help them to understand that they have a key role to play in helping their son/daughter get back to school and any feelings of blame should be avoided.

Questions may include:

- Have there been any changes at home recently?
- How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected your family?
- Are there any health, medical, or family/social issues that should be considered?
- Has your son/daughter had non-attendance issues before?
- Why do you think they have difficulty attending school?
- Is there a pattern to attendance difficulties? When does and doesn't the CYP attend school? What is different about those times?
- Do they have difficulties getting out of bed / leaving the house / getting to school?
- Is your son/daughter often late for school?
- How does their non-attendance impact on members of the family? Who does the CYP listen to? What have you found to be helpful?
- What is the impact on the CYP of them avoiding school – both positive and negative? Is avoiding school reinforcing their anxiety?

Parents who are struggling at this time could be guided to the Top tips for parents (Appendix F) or engage with the school's Family Support Worker (where available). There is also a helpful leaflet from Young Minds that explains key strategies for supporting CYP who are anxious about attending school <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-guide-to-support-a-z/parents-guide-to-support-school-anxiety-and-refusal/>

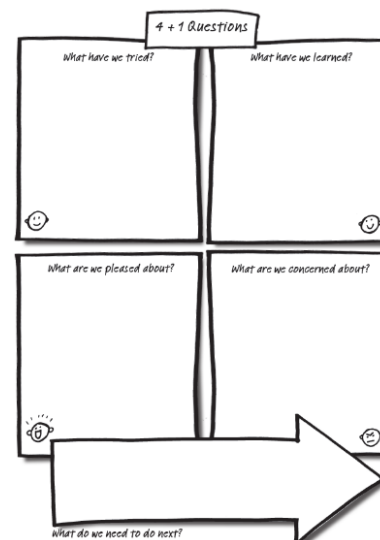




*Working with school staff:* Each member of staff that the CYP interacts with will have a different relationship with them and will be able to provide input on the triggers of their anxiety and what helps/hinders them in class. Acknowledge that staff may have noticed changes over time and may also feel emotional about their work with the CYP. Work together to understand the CYP and use the questions below and recommended tool (Appendix F) to understand what they have already tried and what has/hasn't worked in the past etc. In addition, Therapeutic Thinking tools such as the Subconscious/Conscious Behaviour Checklist, Anxiety Analysis and Therapeutic Tree may support your discussions. (Please contact the Therapeutic Thinking Lead for access to these tools).

Questions may include:

- What are their strengths?
- Have you noticed any difficulties in class?
- Are they an active participant in lessons?
- Have there been any difficulties with friends?
- How are their relationships with adults?
- What is their response to academic tasks?
- If they have been upset/anxious in class, what did this look like and what was the trigger?
- What support or differentiation is in place and how do they respond to this?
- What is your understanding of their attendance problem?
- What do you think would help?
- What strategies have been most helpful so far in managing their attendance/anxiety?



Through your information gathering, you may find it helpful to consider whether the CYP is experiencing EBSA (as opposed to their behaviours being more reflective of truancy or parentally condoned absence), and if so, where in the EBSA Continuum they are situated. Furthermore, you can explore the factors contributing towards school non-attendance.

*Is the CYP experiencing EBSA?*

For unauthorised absences, there is a need to understand whether the CYP is displaying EBSA behaviours or not attending due to truancy or parentally condoned absence (Thambirajah et al., 2008). In reality, it may be difficult to separate out the rationale for non-attendance due to multiple complex and interacting factors. The table below reminds us of the definitions for EBSA, truancy and parentally condoned absence.

<b>EBSA</b>	<b>Truancy</b>	<b>Parentally condoned absence</b>
CYP absence from school that is driven by the negative emotions experienced when in school, or at the thought of going to school. Parents are generally aware of their child's absence and are working to support a return to school.	CYP absence from school is motivated by a milder dislike of school or by the potential to pursue more pleasurable activities outside of school, or tangible rewards (e.g. spending time with a friend or playing computer games). Neither parents nor school have given permission for the absence and parents may not be aware.	School absence which is known about and accepted by parents (perhaps due to their own ambivalent feelings about school), or which may be encouraged by parents who wish to have their child home for their own benefit (Gallé-Tessonau and Heyne, 2020).

Thambirajah et al. (2008)



Use the table in Appendix C to understand more about the profile of a CYP experiencing each type of absence and additional questions that may be posed to the CYP, parents and teachers to help clarify the non-attendance status.

Where truancy or parentally condoned absence is identified, parents may benefit from support from the school's Family Support Worker or it may be appropriate to complete a referral to the Contact Advice and Assessment Service (CAAS) or the Early Response Hub. Any child with persistent absence of 10% will be referred to the school Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) who will liaise with the school and parents to encourage the pupil to return to school.

### *Where is the CYP on the EBSA Continuum?*

Where it has been confirmed that the CYP is experiencing EBSA, use the school's attendance data and additional information from the CYP, parents and teachers (Appendix D-F) to gain an accurate description of the CYP's difficulties so that it is possible to determine their level on the EBSA Continuum below.

Level one	Level two	Level three	Level four
The CYP has been attending school but shows occasional reluctance to attend and/or is anxious about attending school.	The CYP has been attending school but they are experiencing high levels of anxiety. Parents express that they can appear reluctant to attend school. Occasional absences may occur.	The CYP displays periods of sporadic absence which are increasing. Patterns may be found within these periods of non-attendance. Reluctance to attend school is noted by parents.	The CYP is absent from school over an extended period of time. They are reluctant to attend school and their negative feelings about school can feel strong and intense.

Thambirajah et al. (2008); adapted from Derbyshire Educational Psychology Service (2020)

At the end of this section, guided EBSA examples are provided for each EBSA level detailing the key steps and recommended actions (see below).

## PLAN

### Step three – Identify key personnel to support the CYP

It is important to ensure that the right team is in place to support the CYP with their needs and anxieties. It should be acknowledged that the CYP should be at the centre of this team and fully involved in working towards a solution. Each school should set up an appropriate team that reflects the severity of need as measured by the EBSA Continuum. The school and parents should work together, avoid blame, and acknowledge the efforts that everyone is making under difficult circumstances. External professionals may also be consulted as part of this process and referrals to agencies should be sought once the EBSA plan has been implemented and reviewed as part of a graduated approach. Clarify the roles of those involved to ensure that all parties understand the expectations of them and that they take responsibility for supporting successful reintegration into school. The following section gives some non-exhaustive examples of roles that may be involved as part of a psychologically informed approach to EBSA.

*Role of the family:* Family members will need to work together to support the affected CYP as they take steps towards returning to school. This will involve reviewing or creating



supportive routines (e.g. mornings and bed time), which are consistently implemented to ensure structure and predictability in home life. Families will need to be supportive, warm and caring, whilst also clear and firm in their expectations about school attendance and educational activities. If other professionals are involved (for example, Family Support Workers) it is important that advice and plans are consistently followed. Regular, open contact with school is essential, with a view to working in partnership with one another and participating in information gathering, planning and review meetings.

*Role of the school:* School staff monitor attendance and where attendance levels fall, school have a responsibility to identify this at the earliest opportunity and be proactive in putting in place steps for improvement. Where a CYP has been identified for further action, a senior staff member should support the teacher/TA in championing needs and play an active role in supporting the CYP back to school. They will help to develop and implement the EBSA plan and review at regular intervals.

*Role of the Educational Psychologist:* Your Link Educational Psychologist can support by providing advice and guidance to help you to implement the steps outlined in this document. Using your EP time, they may be able to support consultations, facilitate meetings, develop therapeutic plans, review progress, and/or provide advice on support strategies. Your EP may be able to support you in the information gathering stages, or by skilling up your broader staff team by providing training.

*Role of the Therapeutic Thinking Support Team:* The Therapeutic Thinking Support Team (TTST) may be involved in supporting schools to use Therapeutic Thinking tools to better understand the behaviour of CYP. They may give advice and guidance on group dynamics to allow for CYP to be grouped according to their needs at this time. For example, by accessing a small garden, some CYP will find it much easier to attend school and will be much more comfortable in the school environment. TTST may also work with others (e.g. Educational Psychologists and schools) to help develop Therapeutic Plans that support a pupil's reintegration into school. In line with the Therapeutic Thinking Support and Signpost (SAS) stepped approach, you may wish to consider applying for additional financial support to assist with appropriate provision.

*Role of the Mental Health Support Team:* The Mental Health Support Team (MHST) can work with schools in supporting CYP who are experiencing anxiety and low mood, either through problem solving surgeries, or through more direct work. This direct work might include support for parents (e.g. how to help their child to manage their anxiety) or work with young people (depending on age). MHST can also help schools to think about ways of creating social, emotional and physical environments that are supportive of the emotional wellbeing and positive mental health of all. MHST offer a range of training to schools relating to mental health, including Psychological Perspectives in Education and Primary Care modules (PPEP Care).

*Role of the Emotional Health Academy (EHA):* The Emotional Health Academy (EHA) is West Berkshire's early intervention emotional health service. EHA works directly with children and young people up to 18 years of age supporting them to prevent emotional health problems from escalating and to reduce the impact of the issues on their lives. EHA is made up of a team of Emotional Health Workers who work in the community, and a clinical team of Primary Mental Health Workers who provide supervision and additional clinical support. EHA can be accessed through Emotional Health Triage which is the gateway to many different early support options and the way that West Berkshire services work together to promote children and young people's access to emotional health support. For more information, please contact EHA Referral Coordinator on 01635 519018 or email [emotional.health.triage@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:emotional.health.triage@westberks.gov.uk).



Alternatively, schools can also purchase the services of Emotional Health Workers to work in their school through the West Berkshire Schools Traded offer. Our Emotional Health Workers use targeted, evidence based practice to support children with a wide range of issues, in one-to-one sessions, small groups or class-based sessions. EHA also provide services for parents and staff. For more information please call 01635 503200 or email [EHA.Traded.Services@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:EHA.Traded.Services@westberks.gov.uk)

Further information on EHA can be found at: [www.westberks.gov.uk/eha](http://www.westberks.gov.uk/eha)

**Role of the Autism Team:** The Autism Team works to support mainstream schools and academies in responding to the learning, behaviour and social skills needs of children and young people who have a diagnosis of autism, including those who are finding school a difficult environment. This can involve: providing support and guidance (including training/development opportunities) for school staff, providing guidance and strategies for specific pupils and supporting in the development of self-help strategies for children and young people and staff.

The service also provides support to families and carers following an autism diagnosis. This can take many forms: providing listening support and guidance in response to questions, providing information for families (including signposting to other services), providing and managing training programmes to support parents and carers in feeling equipped to support their children as needed.

**Role of the Specialist Inclusion Support Service (SISS):** SISS provides a service for mainstream schools to support the planning of provision for children and young people with very significant needs in relation to 'Cognition and Learning' in Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, 2, 3 or 4. The service can offer support in planning provision, access to the curriculum, differentiation, strategies to support learning, writing SAPs and visits to either Brookfields Special School or The Castle Special School where support and strategies can be seen in action.

**Role of the Cognition and Learning Team (CaLT):** CaLT is a traded advisory service accessible to mainstream primary and secondary schools in West Berkshire. The service provides a range of support to schools where there are concerns regarding a child's literacy, numeracy and related skills (e.g. including motor skill development). CaLT can provide staff training and other forms of staff continuous professional development and pupil assessments, leading to the development of advice and guidance on supporting the pupil. They are also available to participate in multi-professional meetings.

**Role of the Education Welfare and Safeguarding Service (EWSS):** The EWSS works to support children and young people of statutory school age who may be experiencing difficulties in attending school for a variety of reasons. This work may include directly meeting children and young people and their families to discuss difficulties and possible solutions, and providing support and guidance. The team may also liaise with other agencies regarding the support needed. Where efforts to bring about change and promote attendance have been unsuccessful, the EWSS may carry out the statutory duty of legal action as a next step.

This above list is not exhaustive and there are a number of other teams within the local authority and school who will be able to support the CYP with EBSA needs; for example, the Exclusions Officer, SEN Officer, Family Support Worker and ELSA etc.

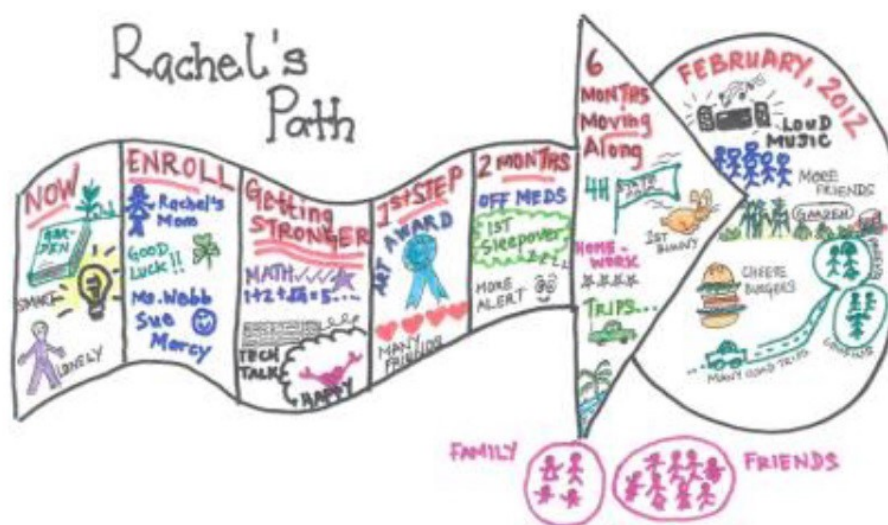


### Step four – Develop a shared understanding of the situation

It is important to reach a shared understanding of the situation and to develop working assumptions upon which to develop an EBSA plan.

- What are the CYP's strengths; such as, having ambition, motivation and aspiration, confidence, developing feelings of safety etc.
- What are the risk and resilience factors: factors that *push* the CYP towards attending school, and those that *pull* them away?
- What is the function of their EBSA behaviour – are they avoiding something that elicits negative feelings, escaping social situations, gaining attention/ spending time with someone or enjoying time out of school as that is fun (see Section One: Background and research for more information).
- What is maintaining/reinforcing their EBSA behaviours?

Depending where the CYP has been mapped on the EBSA Continuum, different tools may be utilised to achieve this shared understanding (see Guided EBSA examples). This may range from having a regular telephone conversation with the parent, using Therapeutic Thinking tools or developing a person-centered solution such as a PATH\*. At all levels of the EBSA Continuum, it will be important to engage with the CYP and their family to understand their needs and anxieties.



### Step five – Develop EBSA plan

Co-produce (CYP, parents & other professionals) a bespoke plan that is specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (SMART) to promote a rapid return to school. This may take the form of a Risk Reduction Plan or a Predict and Prevent Plan (Please contact the Therapeutic Thinking Lead to access this tool) if the CYP is experiencing EBSA at Level One, whereas a full Therapeutic Plan, specific to EBSA (Appendix J) may be more helpful if the level of need is higher. The plan should take into account all of the contributing factors and the CYP should have a voice in developing this plan. It is important to acknowledge the difference between introvert and extrovert CYP and how their needs can be met through intervention.



Any school return should be gradual and setbacks should be anticipated along the way. It is important to work collaboratively and flexibly to take into account the needs of the CYP. Build success realistically and slowly over time, rather than having ambitious expectations of reintegration. Do not rush through the plan, even if it is going well, as adaptation to change and developing feelings of safety take time.

The plan should take into account:

- CYP's strengths
- EBSA push/pull factors
- CYP's conscious and subconscious behaviours
- The root causes of the behaviour (Therapeutic Tree)
- CYP's preferred subjects/ staff/ times of day/teachers and peers that they have a good relationship with (based upon Anxiety Analysis)
- Strategies that have worked well in the past
- Strategies that might help with attendance/ engagement
- Group dynamics

The plan should address:

- Differentiated experiences to help lower anxiety and create pro-social experiences, feeling and behaviours.
- Clarity over what to expect in school i.e. how to create a predictable, consistent environment and timetable for both structured and unstructured parts of the day.
- Preparation of key scripts that can be shared with staff for consistency and to put the CYP at ease.
- An appropriate welcome back on day one i.e. who will be there to meet the CYP, is this at a different time, what happens next, will there be check-ins during the day?
- How to ensure the CYP feels safe and ready to learn by ensuring basic needs are met i.e. physical needs, (physical and emotional) sensory needs, safety needs, belonging and esteem needs.
- Have opportunities to talk about/express their anxieties been anticipated and built into the CYP's day i.e. 'Share it, Shelve it, Shout it' (Knightsmith, 2020).
- How the CYP can alert teachers when they are feeling anxious. Develop an agreed response with the CYP and ensure this is consistently handled by all school staff.
- Build in review dates: small steps to be reviewed in school each week and communicated to parents over the phone with a formal review meeting every 4 weeks.

## DO

### Step six – Implement EBSA plan

Implement the agreed plan being mindful that the CYP will experience significant levels of anxiety as they first come back to school. All adults supporting the CYP should be appropriately trained and aware of the plan (including lunchtime staff) and the difficulties that have led to the behaviours. These should include planned scripted language as a response to difficult and/or dangerous behaviours and modelling of prosocial behaviours. All adults should adhere to the agreed plan until the next review period. This will help to develop trust and show consistency of approach.



Ensure that there is support for parents during this time. Help them to establish routines that replicate the school week prior to the CYPs return, including suggestions around sleep, regular morning/evening routines, break times, practising the walk/ route to school etc. Families may benefit from the support of a Family Support Worker to review or re-establish routines.

In school, ensure that the CYP feels supported and that staff are taking a genuine interest in them i.e. friendly greetings, talk about shared interests etc. Establish a safe place for the CYP to go if they become overwhelmed and identify a member of staff to 'check in' with them throughout the day.

Consider a gradual increase in expectation (e.g. time in school, time in lessons) based on progress (plan, do, review). Ensure all steps are negotiated and agreed with the CYP and that school reintegration moves at the right pace for them.

**REVIEW**

**Step seven – Review and learn**

Regular reviews are essential. Ensure the CYP is involved in this review, hear their voice and understand what is working and what should be changed. It is important to celebrate all successes however small, as everyone is working hard to support this CYP and change their future. Ensure regular communication with parents to monitor changes in behaviours/ emotions and ensure collaboration, returning to the Therapeutic Plan and PATH as required. Highlight how school are helping the CYP to feel valued and cared about as an important member of the school community.

It will be important to review step one for the whole school at regular intervals as difficult feelings about school may build over time and behaviour change may be subtle and hard to notice unless monitoring is in place. Maintain an awareness of Inclusion Circles and any CYP who shift from being safe to unsafe learners. A general focus on wellbeing can help to reduce the number of CYP experiencing EBSA.

**Guided EBSA examples for steps 3-7 for each level of the EBSA Continuum**

At all stages of the EBSA referral process, schools may wish to consult the Therapeutic Thinking Support and Signpost stepped approach for further guidance and where appropriate, financial support.

<b>LEVEL ONE</b>	<b>The CYP has been attending school but shows occasional reluctance to attend and/or is anxious about attending school</b>	<b>Tools/resources</b>
<b>Identify key personnel</b>	Parents, Teacher, TA, + EP ( for advice)	
<b>Develop shared understanding</b>	Support parents by sending out information on how to manage anxiety including information for the CYP (age appropriate)  Teacher to talk to CYP and parents about CYP's anxiety.	Wellbeing and Recovery: returning to settings/ school following Covid-19 [Presentation and Activity Booklet for parents] (West Berkshire Council, June 2020)  Person-centred tools (Appendix D)



		Tips on managing anxiety for parents, teachers and CYP (Appendices F-I)
<b>Develop EBSA plan (SMART)</b>	Identify accommodations that can be made to reduce CYP's anxiety on their return to school (some of these may be addressed by a whole school approach to wellbeing and recovery). Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on wellbeing and social and emotional health</li> <li>• Teach CYP relaxation techniques</li> <li>• Practise anxiety-reduction techniques in school and at home</li> <li>• Normalise the worries about missed schooling and the need for 'catch up'</li> <li>• Worry boxes or drop in sessions</li> <li>• Time to welcome CYP back to school and discuss thoughts and feelings</li> <li>• A differentiated transition/first day back plan and clear routines</li> <li>• A gradual return to timetable and workload</li> <li>• Curriculum enrichment such as extra PE and outdoor activities Access to a calm/ sensory object or box</li> <li>• A flexible curriculum that enables CYP to rebuild their skills</li> <li>• Understand, acknowledge and build upon successes and prior knowledge</li> <li>• Rebuild relationships (CYP: CYP and CYP: teacher) 'every interaction is an intervention'</li> <li>• Refer to Emotional Health Triage (EHT) once assess/plan/do/review cycle has been completed</li> <li>• Buddy and befriending scheme</li> </ul>	Therapeutic Thinking Tools: Risk Reduction Plan or Predict and Prevent. At this stage these tools may be sufficient as opposed to a full Therapeutic Plan.  Wellbeing and Recovery: returning to settings/ school following Covid-19 [for schools] (West Berkshire Council, June 2020)
<b>Implement EBSA plan</b>	Implement above actions	
<b>Review and learn</b>	Teacher check-in with CYP and parents to gauge anxiety levels and refine EBSA plan as appropriate	Person-centred tools (Appendix D)

<b>LEVEL TWO</b>	<b>The CYP is attending school but experiencing high levels of anxiety. They are reluctant to attend school and occasional absences may occur</b>	<b>Tools/resources</b>
<b>Identify key personnel</b>	Parents, Teacher, TA, + EP and others as appropriate i.e. Family Support Worker, ASD Advisory Teacher, Autism Advisor for families etc....  <i>Please note: Referral to EHT should only be made once the EBSA plan has been implemented and reviewed as per a graduated approach</i>	





<p><b>Develop shared understanding</b></p>	<p>Support parents by sending information on how to manage anxiety including information for the CYP (age appropriate)</p> <p>Meeting to understand and discuss CYP's anxiety. Use Therapeutic Thinking (TT) tools to map CYP's anxiety for different criteria such as time, staff, peers and activities.</p>	<p>Wellbeing and Recovery: returning to settings/ school following Covid-19 [Presentation and Activity Booklet for parents] (West Berkshire Council, June 2020)</p> <p>Person-centred tools (Appendix D)</p> <p>Tips on managing anxiety for parents, teachers and CYP (Appendix F-I)</p> <p>Therapeutic Thinking tools (Anxiety Analysis and/or Therapeutic Tree)</p>
<p><b>Develop EBSA plan (SMART)</b></p>	<p>Identify accommodations that can be made to reduce CYP's anxiety. Some examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As Level One +</li> <li>• Identify an EBSA trusted adult to support the CYP</li> <li>• Opportunities for 1:1 time with a trusted adult</li> <li>• Understand anxiety triggers and remove/reduce</li> <li>• Encourage teachers to build and re-build positive relationships</li> <li>• Ensure all staff understand CYP's triggers and there is a consistent approach to working with the CYP (often perceived inconsistencies can lead to anxiety)</li> <li>• Time out card ( that they know how to use)</li> <li>• Access to a quiet/safe area</li> <li>• Responsibility in school i.e. job</li> <li>• Review the child's curriculum offer</li> <li>• Reduce homework pressure</li> <li>• Provide additional support in target lessons</li> </ul>	<p>Wellbeing and Recovery: returning to settings/ school following Covid-19 [for schools] (West Berkshire Council, June 2020)</p> <p>TT Risk reduction plan</p> <p>Anxiety ladder</p> <p>Therapeutic Plan for EBSA</p>
<p><b>Implement EBSA plan</b></p>	<p>Implement above actions</p>	
<p><b>Review and learn</b></p>	<p>Regular review of anxiety levels and refine EBSA plan as appropriate</p>	<p>Person-centred tools (Appendix D)</p>

<p><b>LEVEL THREE</b></p>	<p><b>The CYP is displaying periods of sporadic absence which are increasing. Patterns may be found within these periods of non-attendance. Reluctance to attend school is noted by parents.</b></p>	<p><b>Tools/resources</b></p>
<p><b>Identify key personnel</b></p>	<p>Parents, Teacher, TA + EP and others as appropriate i.e. Family Support Worker, ASD Advisory teacher, EWO, Social worker, TTST, MHST, Exclusions Officer etc.</p>	



	<i>Please note: Access to these services may be subject to school Service Level Agreements, or dependent upon school status (e.g. MHST is available to trailblazer schools only)</i>	
<b>Develop shared understanding</b>	<p>Support parents by sending information on how to manage anxiety including information for the CYP (age appropriate) – if not already sent</p> <p>Meeting with wider range of professionals to understand and discuss CYP’s anxiety. Use Therapeutic Thinking (TT) tools to map CYP’s anxiety with a view to creating a therapeutic plan.</p>	<p>Wellbeing and Recovery: returning to settings/ school following Covid-19 [Presentation and Activity Booklet for parents] (West Berkshire Council, June 2020)</p> <p>Person-centred tools (Appendix D)</p> <p>Tips on managing anxiety for parents, teachers and CYP (Appendices F-I)</p> <p>Therapeutic Thinking tools (Anxiety Analysis and/or Therapeutic Tree)</p>
<b>Develop EBSA plan (SMART)</b>	<p>Identify accommodations that can be made to reduce CYP’s anxiety based upon the patterns found by their non-attendance/anxiety mapping. Some examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As Level Two +</li> <li>• Development of small garden</li> <li>• Additional differentiation based upon specific needs</li> <li>• Additional flexibility to accommodate individual needs</li> </ul>	<p>Wellbeing and Recovery: returning to settings/ school following Covid-19 [for schools] (West Berkshire Council, June 2020)</p> <p>Risk reduction plan</p> <p>Therapeutic Plan</p> <p>Anxiety ladder</p>
<b>Implement EBSA plan</b>	Implement above actions	
<b>Review and learn</b>	Regular meetings to review anxiety levels and refine EBSA plan as appropriate	Person-centred tools (Appendix D)

<b>LEVEL FOUR</b>	<b>The CYP is absent from school over an extended period of time. They are reluctant to attend school and their negative feelings about school can feel strong and intense.</b>	<b>Tools/resources</b>
<b>Identify key personnel</b>	<p>Parents, Teacher, TA + EP and others as appropriate i.e. Family Support Worker, ASD Advisory teacher, Exclusions Officer, EWO, Social worker, TTST, MHST, PRU, SEN team, Home Education Service, CAMHS etc.</p> <p>Please note: Any child with persistent absence of 10% will be referred to the Education Welfare Officer (EWO). Access to some services may be subject to school Service Level Agreements or school status (e.g. only trailblazer schools have access to MHST).</p>	



<b>Develop shared understanding</b>	Support parents by sending information on how to manage anxiety including information for the CYP (age appropriate) – if not already sent  Facilitated meetings to understand and discuss CYP's anxiety and develop solution-focused plans for the future. Use person-centred tools based upon TT approach or PATH (Ask your Link EP about this)	Wellbeing and Recovery: returning to settings/ school following Covid-19 [Presentation and Activity Booklet for parents] (West Berkshire Council, June 2020)  Person-centred tools (Appendix D)  Tips on managing anxiety for parents and CYP (Appendices F-I)  Therapeutic Thinking tools (Anxiety Analysis and/or Therapeutic Tree)
<b>Develop EBSA plan (SMART)</b>	Identify accommodations that can be made to reduce CYP's anxiety based upon individual needs. Some examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As Level Three +</li> <li>- Bespoke plan based on individual situation/needs</li> <li>- Fresh Start (where appropriate and if there are school specific difficulties)</li> </ul>	Wellbeing and Recovery: returning to settings/ school following Covid-19 [for schools] (West Berkshire Council, June 2020)  Therapeutic Plan or PATH*
<b>Implement EBSA plan</b>	Implement above actions	
<b>Review and learn</b>	Regular meetings to review anxiety levels and refine EBSA plan as appropriate	Person-centred tools (Appendix D)

\*PATH stands for 'Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope' and begins by visualising a positive future for the CYP and captures the steps needed to get there. The PATH is a solution-focused tool and is very useful for building confidence, motivation and engagement and drilling down into what a preferred future might look like (Inclusive Solutions, 2020). This is a helpful starting point for a CYP displaying EBSA symptoms as it is a solution-focused way to help build a better future, whilst at the same time addressing some of the difficulties of the current situation. This is completed collaboratively. Please see the following website for more information on the PATH approach: <https://inclusive-solutions.com/person-centred-planning/path/> Your Link EP may be able to support you in facilitating a PATH session.

## Summary

In Section Two we firstly presented a flowchart detailing our recommended approach, based on the available research evidence and psychological theories, to supporting CYP who are experiencing EBSA. The steps outlined in this process were then discussed in detail and this section has concluded with a series of guided examples, which it is hoped will give you some ideas for supporting CYP at different stages on the EBSA Continuum.

Please now refer to the Appendices Section for copies of the tools and documents highlighted in this Guidance.

Please contact West Berkshire Educational Psychology Service for further information on EBSA and on supporting your whole school setting and CYP more generally in order to reduce incidences of EBSA.

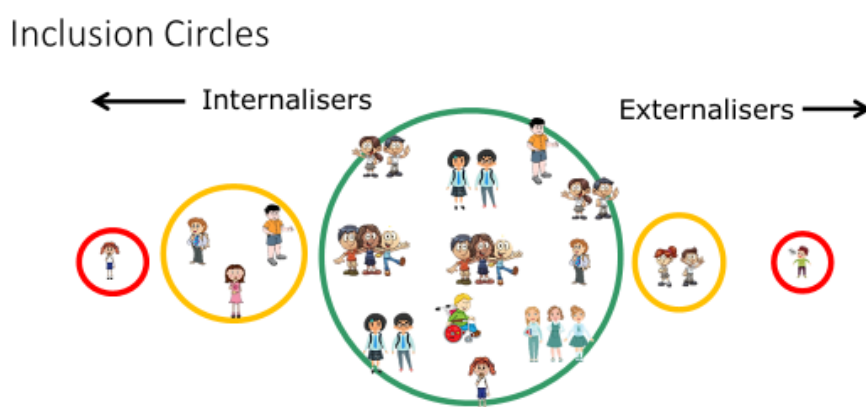


## Appendix A: Profile of Risk of EBSA

To help us to understand which CYP may be at a greater risk of experiencing EBSA, and to accordingly plan for early intervention and support, it can be helpful to appraise the circumstances of individual CYP, identifying the particular risk and resilience factors that apply. The checklist that follows can help you to do this (adapted from West Sussex, 2018 and Derbyshire, 2020).

### When to use this tool

Earlier in this Guidance, attention was drawn to the Therapeutic Thinking concept of Inclusion Circles.



(Wadham, 2020)

Whilst best practice would involve appraising the circumstances of all CYP in a class, it may be helpful to initially focus attention on those CYP whom are currently felt to be situated within the amber and red circles; those CYP identified as 'unsafe learners'. At this preliminary stage, it for these learners one might expect to find the greatest risk of EBSA.

However, please be aware that, given the Covid-19 pandemic, some CYP may have had experiences which have caused them to shift from the green circle into the amber or red circles. Conversely, other learners may have moved in the opposite direction: the absence of school based risk factors may have enabled them to transition from being an unsafe learner in school to being a safe learner at home or in a smaller bubble in school. It is important to be cued into key information from contact with families during the school closure period.

As a further note, it will not always be CYP for whom there appears to be a high level of risk that experience EBSA. Some CYP may appear to be coping well, but may go on to find it difficult to maintain their school attendance.

### How to use this tool

This tool is intended for use by school staff who know a CYP well. Appraise each of the areas denoted below, indicating the level of concern experienced with regard each factor. A score of 0 would denote no concern, 1 = mild concern, 2 = some concern, 3 = a reasonable level of concern, 4 = a fairly considerable level of concern and a 5, a high level of concern. Where information is unknown this should be noted, and where possible, this information should be gathered.



When all areas have been rated, consider the results as a whole. As all CYP and circumstances are different, there is no definitive cut-off which may indicate that EBSA is low/medium/high risk. However, you may consider: have a significant number of items received a score of 3 or above? What may the impact of certain experiences be for one CYP as opposed to another? You may wish to think about a graduated response to EBSA, and to the other wellbeing needs of CYP, taking into account how scores may be clustering on the profile.

At the end of the profile is an area for you to record summative thoughts and notes about the factors experienced, and the impact of these. It may also be helpful to think about any initial or straight forward steps you may take, even at this early stage, to support the positive mental health and wellbeing of this CYP in school. These early actions may suffice to promote prosocial experiences and feelings in order to considerably lower any possible risk of EBSA.



**Profile of Risk of EBSA**

Considering the current attendance patterns can help to understand where behaviours may have begun to change, or where the early signs of problems may be emerging.

		→ Increasing Level of Concern →					
<b>Attendance pattern</b>	Unknown	0	1	2	3	4	5
Reluctance to leave the house for school							
Late arrivals at school							
Missed lessons							
Has previously left school site							
Has been absent for whole days							
Impact of Covid-19 on attendance							
Further Information:							

Loss and change can take many forms. It is important to remember that what may be a significant experience of loss for one CYP may affect another less significantly.

		→ Increasing Level of Concern →					
<b>Loss &amp; Change</b>	Unknown	0	1	2	3	4	5
Death of key adult							
Death of key child							
Illness of key adult							
Illness of key child							
Death or illness of pet							
Other traumatic event (Adverse Childhood Experience)							
Separation from key adult/s							
Moving house, area							
Past experiences of transition (school/year/Key Stage)							
Changes in friendship group							
Impact of Covid-19							
Further Information:							



Family and home dynamics can have a considerable impact on CYP. Consider how CYP may have been affected by additional time spent entirely at home, with little contact with friends, teachers or extended family members.

		→ Increasing Level of Concern →					
<b>Family</b>	Unknown	0	1	2	3	4	5
Parenting style/s							
Secure relationships - present							
Secure relationships – past							
Feels safe & loved							
New baby							
Sibling dynamics (role models, jealousy etc.)							
Other household dynamics							
Parental stress							
Family stressors exacerbated by Covid-19							
Poverty							
Further Information:							

As CYP return to school, social factors related to peers may begin to have more of an impact on their overall wellbeing.

		→ Increasing Level of Concern →					
<b>School - peers</b>	Unknown	0	1	2	3	4	5
Feeling bullied							
Feeling isolated							
Lack of pro-social skills							
Other peer group dynamics							
Lack of sense of belonging							
Social Communication style difficulties, or autism							
Dislikes social or unstructured time							
Changes since Covid-19							
Further Information:							



Academic pressures can impact CYP differently. The Covid-19 school closures mean that CYP have had very different experiences of education and learning over recent months.

		→ Increasing Level of Concern →					
<b>School – learning</b>	Unknown	0	1	2	3	4	5
Low literacy levels							
Low language levels							
General learning difficulties/ special needs							
EAL learning related issues							
Slow processing speed							
Memory difficulties							
Organisational difficulties							
Lack of self-belief							
Lack of motivation							
Exam or test anxiety							
Specific subject difficulties							
Specific teacher difficulties							
Issues with PE/games							
Further Information:							

		→ Increasing Level of Concern →					
<b>Wellbeing</b>	Unknown	0	1	2	3	4	5
Self-belief							
Sense of belonging							
EAL related issues							
Cultural or religious differences							
Emerging sexuality or gender identity issues							
Low mood/depression							
Anxiety/panic							





Internalising behaviours							
Evidence of characteristics of introversion							
Externalising behaviours							
Physical disability/issues							
Learning disability/issues							
Sensory issues							
Prosocial experiences and feelings							
Sleep factors							
Diet							
Exercise							
Connections to others (relationships)							
Sense of purpose in daily life							
Body image							
Sense of safety							
Changes since Covid-19							
Further Information:							

Use the space below to record any other factors that are pertinent to the CYP under consideration at this time.

		→ Increasing Level of Concern →					
<b>Other issues identified</b>	Unknown	0	1	2	3	4	5
Further Information:							



**Key Factors Contributing to Emotionally Based School Avoidance**

**Loss & Change**

**Family**

**School - peers**

**School - learning**

**Wellbeing**



**Impact of Covid-19**

**Other**

**Next steps**

Having completed the Profile of Risk, you may have identified that the CYP under consideration requires further support in relation to EBSA, as detailed through the graduated response guidance. In this case, please continue to Step Two and refer to the person-centred tools guide, and information gathering templates provided in order to begin to plan their support.

Alternatively, you may have concluded that, whilst the risk of EBSA is fairly low, there are steps you might consider taking to support the CYP with their more immediate positive mental health and wellbeing. For instance, it may have been identified that a CYP would benefit from accessing an extracurricular activity to help them to develop friendships and a sense of connection. In this scenario, please use the box below to record your actions.

**Actions**



## Appendix B: Information gathering - Is the CYP experiencing EBSA?

Use the table below to further clarify whether the CYP is displaying EBSA as opposed to truancy or parentally condoned absence. NB: This table (adapted from Thambirajah et al., 2008) is for guidance only and examples may not fully describe all presenting behaviours or contributing factors.

	<b>EBSA</b>	<b>Truancy</b>	<b>Parentally condoned absence</b>
<b>Description</b>	CYP absence from school that is driven by the negative emotions experienced when in school, or at the thought of going to school. Parents are generally aware of their child's absence and are working to support a return to school.	CYP absence from school is motivated by a milder dislike of school or by the potential to pursue more pleasurable activities outside of school, or tangible rewards (e.g. spending time with a friend or playing computer games). Neither parents nor school have given permission for the absence and parents may not be aware	School absence which is known about and accepted by parents (perhaps due to their own ambivalent feelings about school), or which may be encouraged by parents who wish to have their child home for their own benefit (Gallé-Tessonneau and Heyne, 2020).
<b>Example profile of CYP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CYP likes school</li> <li>- CYP experiences emotional difficulties relating to school including anxiety, physical tantrums/symptoms</li> <li>- CYP makes frequent requests to leave class to go to the toilet/feel unwell</li> <li>- When absent from school, the CYP stays at home</li> <li>- Parents are aware</li> <li>- CYP refuses to get ready in the morning/leave the house or car</li> <li>- CYP panics once in school and wants to go home</li> <li>- Lack of anxiety at weekends or once the decision has been made not to go to school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CYP does not want to be in school</li> <li>- CYP lacks interest in school work</li> <li>- CYP openly acknowledges their dislike of school</li> <li>- CYP shows defiance, aggression and rule breaking</li> <li>- CYP lacks excessive fear, guilt or anxiety about not attending school</li> <li>- When absent from school, the CYP avoids home and school*</li> <li>- CYP makes up excuses for their school absence</li> </ul> <p>*NB: Sometimes parents do not know how to help their son/daughter so know about the truancy and allow them to stay at home.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parent influences CYP to stay at home to meet their own needs i.e. comfort, support, chores, caring responsibilities</li> <li>- CYP has frequent absences for medical reasons</li> <li>- CYP withdrawn from school due to conflict with school staff</li> <li>- No education for the CYP is being provided at home</li> </ul>



<p><b>Example questions to clarify status of absence</b></p>	<p>Does the CYP talk about worries at school? What do they say?</p> <p>How can you tell the CYP is anxious about attending school?</p> <p>When do the CYPs difficulties start? (i.e. getting out of bed/getting dressed/into and out of the car etc...)</p> <p>Does the CYP want to be in school?</p> <p>When in school, what behaviours indicate that the CYP may feel anxious about being there?</p> <p>How does the CYP feel when they do not have to go to school? (once agreed to stay at home / weekends)</p>	<p>What does the CYP say about school?</p> <p>What is the CYP's behaviour like in school?</p> <p>Does the CYP worry about not being in school?</p> <p>What does the CYP do when they are absent from school? (What would their day look like?)</p> <p>Do the parents know that their son/daughter is not attending school?</p> <p>Are parents concerned that their son/daughter is not attending school?</p> <p>Do parents know where their son/daughter is when they are absent from school?</p>	<p>Are parents concerned about the child's absence?</p> <p>What does the CYP do when they are absent from school? (What would their day look like?)</p> <p>Do parents rely on the CYP at home to help with caring duties/chores?</p> <p>Is education important to the family?</p> <p>Is there any conflict between school/home?</p> <p>Is the CYP receiving education whilst at home?</p>
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General questions about attendance could include:

- Has the Covid-19 pandemic affected your family?
- Are there any relevant health, medical, sensory or family/social changes that may be impacting on the CYP's ability to attend school?
- Does the CYP have a history of non-attendance? If so, what were the triggers? What enabled the CYP go back to school?
- Is there a pattern to attendance difficulties? When does the CYP attend school and why? Are they avoiding or gaining something?
- When does their anxiety start? Do they have difficulties leaving the house/getting out of the car etc.? What have you found to be helpful?
- Why do you think they have difficulty attending school?
- How does their non-attendance impact the family? Who does the CYP listen to most? Why?
- Please describe a typical school day versus a non-school day
- What is the impact on the CYP of them avoiding school – both positive and negative? Is avoiding school reinforcing their anxiety?



## Appendix C: Information gathering - Additional questions

Additional information should be collected to address any gaps within the EBSA Risk Profile and to uncover additional push/pull factors influencing the EBSA behaviours. Information will need to be collected relating to 3 main areas: CYP, family/home and school factors:

CYP factors	Family/home factors	School factors
What are their strengths?	Who lives at home/who is in your family? Who are they closest to?	What is going well in school? (e.g. teachers, lessons, friends)
What are they most proud of?	Do they have a close/secure relationship with parents and/or siblings?	Do they have a positive relationships with peers?
Do they have hobbies/engage in activities outside of school?	Is it a stable home environment?	Have there been any changes to friendships recently?
What type of temperament / personality do they have i.e. introversion/extroversion?	Are parents able to meet the son/daughter's needs?	Do they have positive relationships with staff? Who do they get on with...who doesn't s/he get on with?
Are they physically healthy?	Do they have a wider network of family/friends?	Do they have the thinking and learning skills needed to access school tasks?
How is their mental health?	Is parenting consistent?	Are they able to cope with change in school?
Does the CYP have EAL needs?	Are there clear routines at home?	Are they experiencing bullying? Or cyber bullying?
Does the CYP have SEN?	Is there any conflict at home?	Are there particular subjects/teachers that they find difficult/dislike/boring? Is there anything else about school they dislike?
Does the CYP have an EHCP?	Are parents over/under protective of the CYP?	How has the transition across key stages or between schools been before? (change in friends, expectations, teachers, workload etc...)
Are there any undiagnosed medical, learning or mental health difficulties?	Are parents able to support with schoolwork/home?	Are their learning needs being met?
Are they experiencing symptoms of anxiety and/or depression?	Do they take part in hobbies/sport and leisure activities outside of school?	Is the discipline policy too harsh or lenient?
Do they worry about things?	Have there been any changes to the family dynamic such as: house move, divorce or separation, loss or bereavement?	
Do they have / have they ever had difficulties separating from parents?	Do parents have any mental and/or physical wellbeing issues?	
Do they have appropriate communication and social interaction skills? Do they have friends?	Is the CYP a carer of siblings or parent?	
Do they have appropriate prosocial skills?		



<p>Are they aware of their own strengths and weaknesses?</p> <p>Do they have confidence in own abilities?</p> <p>Have they had experience of success and achievement? Have there been any adverse childhood experiences (trauma)?</p> <p>Do they have any difficulties with sleeping/eating?</p> <p>Do they have clear hopes for the future?</p>	<p>Is the CYP worried about parents/siblings?</p> <p>Is there any additional stress within the family? How has the CYP been affected by Covid-19? How has this affected the family?</p>	<p>Do they feel 'heard' in school?</p> <p>Are they involved in school clubs/teams?</p> <p>Do they feel competent?</p> <p>What would they like to do in the future?</p>
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## Appendix D: Information gathering - Person-centred tools

### Person-centred tools

Person-centred tools aim to capture the voice of the CYP in the most appropriate way possible. The approaches taken will depend on the child's age, level of understanding and language. Even if they are able, often children find it difficult to verbalise what they are thinking and feeling and they may prefer to draw what they are feeling, act them out or use visual prompts. It is important that the adult does not dismiss any anxieties or worries that the CYP discloses. Empathise with the CYP about their worries using active listening techniques but do not collude or promote the EBSA behaviours.

### Views about themselves

General questions could include:

- What do you enjoy doing?
- What are you good at? What would your parents/friends say you are good at?
- What do you find difficult? What would your parents/friends say you find difficult?
- What do you like/dislike about yourself?
- What are your hopes for the future?
- What will your life to be like when you are an adult?

### Tools

- One page profiles to capture the CYP voice – examples below:
- Additional tools can be found at <http://helensandersonassociates.co.uk/person-centred-practice/person-centred-thinking-tools/>

The form consists of several white boxes on a black background:

- Top left: "I like..."
- Top right: "I dislike..."
- Center: A starburst shape containing "3 words to describe me..."
- Bottom left: "I am good at ..."
- Bottom center: "I am not so good at ..."
- Bottom right: A speech bubble containing "Why do you feel this way?" and "What would need to happen to increase that number?"
- Bottom: A wide box containing "Things I would change (if I could) ..."

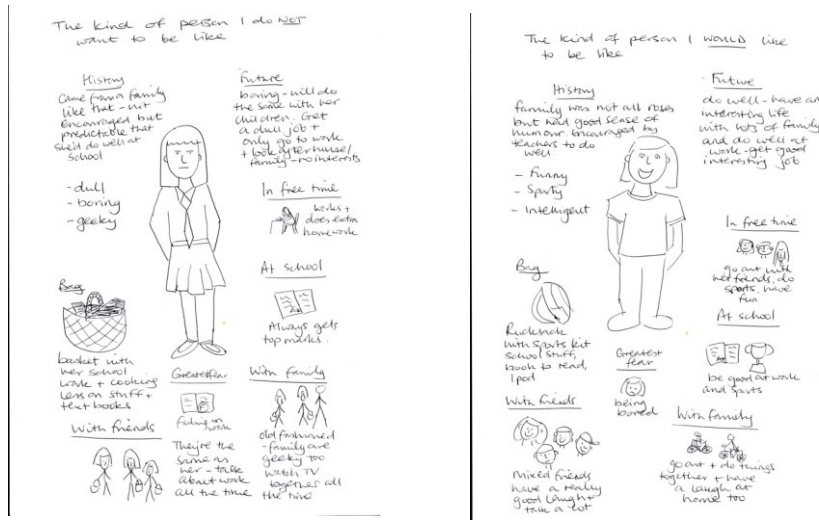
Name:	One Page Profile	17.03.16
Things it is helpful to know about me:	Some challenges I have in school:	
This means that:		
I will help myself by:	It would help me if you could:	
I would like to be able to:	I am receiving the following intervention:	





- Techniques such as Drawing the Ideal Self (Moran, 2020) is a drawing technique that helps to explore a CYP's feelings about themselves when they find this is difficult to talk about. Educational Psychologists can offer support in using these tools or more information can be found at:

[http://drawingtheidealself.co.uk/drawingtheidealself/A\\_PCP\\_technique.html](http://drawingtheidealself.co.uk/drawingtheidealself/A_PCP_technique.html)



## Exploring feelings

Some CYP are able to talk about their feelings, others like to draw or act out their emotions. Where feelings become overwhelming or where a CYP does not have the vocabulary to be able to talk about feelings, this becomes more difficult. In these situations, use picture cards, puppets, photos, and scaling techniques to help the CYP express their views.

## Tools

- Blob Tree (Wilson & Long, 2005) <https://www.blobtree.com/>
- Emotions cards e.g. Bear Cards / Blob Cards/emotions faces
- Emotions thermometers/scaling e.g. Rainbow mood tracker <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/rainbow-mood-tracker/> or feelings thermometers.





## Understanding feelings about school

It is important to consider whether CYP are able to talk about how they feel about school? Do they have the emotional vocabulary to be able to explain this?

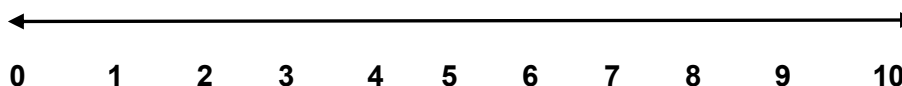
Typical questions:

- What would a perfect day look like?
- Tell me about school. What is the building like? What are the teachers like? How are lessons/ subjects / homework?
- What do you do at break and lunch times?
- Do you have friends in school?
- Are there difficult times of the day for you? I.e. arriving/leaving school, break and lunch times, lining up to go into school or class, changing for PE etc.
- Are there particular aspects of class that you find hard i.e. reading aloud, being chosen to answer questions, group work
- If you could change one thing about school (no promises!), what would it be?
- When you have felt like not attending school before what has helped and/or hindered?

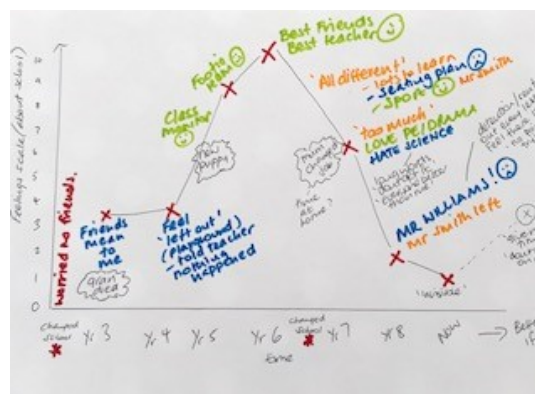
## Tools

- Scaling – This is a way of measuring a CYP’s response to different factors using number lines / faces / emoticons etc. It can be helpful for CYP who find it difficult to express their thoughts and feelings. For example:

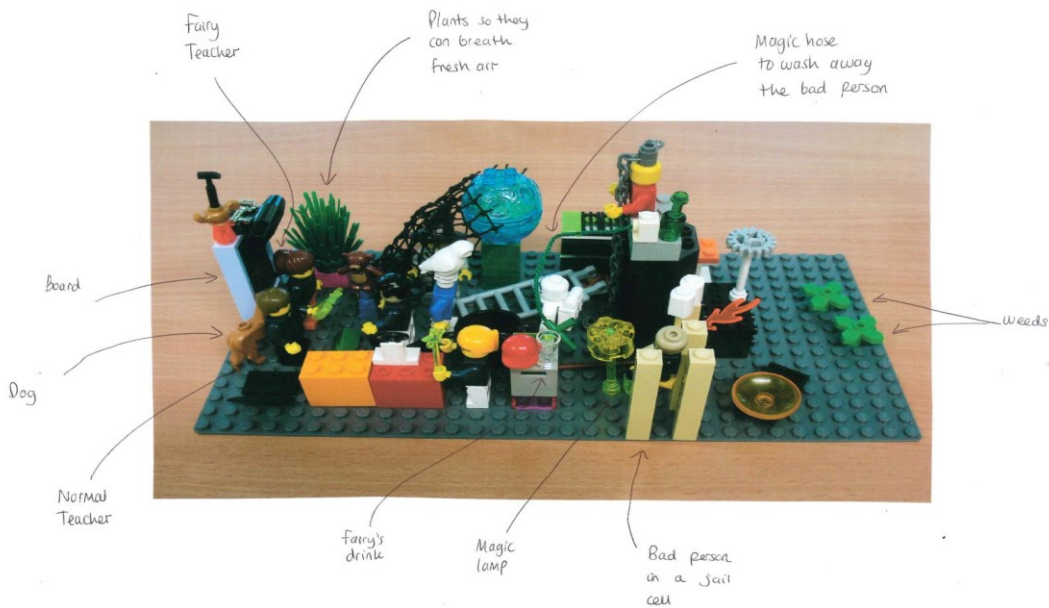
On a scale of 0-10 with 0 being ‘I do not like school’ and 10 being ‘I really enjoy school’ where would you put yourself on the scale right now? Where would you have been last year/at your last school? Where would you like to be on this scale? What would need to happen for you to be one point higher?



An alternative approach, is to use the scaling to track changes over time. Ask how the CYP has felt at particular points in time and identify any factors that may have impacted (positively or negatively) their view of school. Draw this out with the CYP and write down their words verbatim. Offer frequent recaps to ensure their views have been accurately represented.



- Drawing the Ideal School Technique (adapted from an approach developed by Moran, 2001) or The Ideal Classroom (Morgan-Rose, 2015) are creative techniques to enable the CYP to express their likes/dislikes about school using drawing/model-making. Ask the CYP to share what a ‘non-ideal’ classroom would look like first, as this may highlight any concerns or difficulties that are not always obvious to staff.



A Lego model of an ideal classroom (Morgan – Rose, 2015)

A recent extension of this is Drawing the Ideal Safe School (Williams, 2020) which in light of the Covid-19 pandemic helps the CYP to think about what going to a safe school would be like. The CYP is asked to draw what would happen at key stages throughout their day from getting ready for school through to the physical school spaces, teachers, lessons and break times. For more information, please see [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DF9ie2Zr8rG\\_OXxt9pCKKdhqoE2EAmHZ/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DF9ie2Zr8rG_OXxt9pCKKdhqoE2EAmHZ/view)





- The School Stress Survey – This is a helpful tool for CYP who find it difficult to talk about their experiences of school and need visual prompts to help them express their views. The survey uses photos of times within the school day and scaling (using smiley faces) to help CYP rate their school experiences. For more information, please ask your link EP or see [www.HumansNotRobots.co.uk](http://www.HumansNotRobots.co.uk)

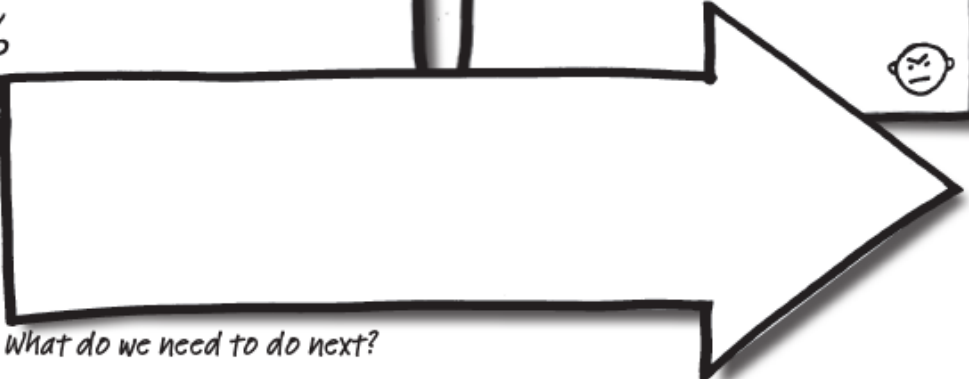
School Stress Survey		☹️ I very often or always feel stress at this. I can't cope with it.	😐 I sometimes feel stress. I don't like it but I can cope.	😊 I feel OK about this. I can cope with it easily.
1. Getting Up & Ready	2. Journey To & From	3. Assembly	4. Corridors	
5. Written Work	6. Break Times	7. Teacher Q&A	8. Team / Group Work	
9. Lunch Times	10. 1 to 1 with Adults	11. Tests	12. Homework	



Appendix E: Information gathering - 4 plus 1 questioning tool

**4 + 1 Questions**

<p><i>What have we tried?</i></p> 	<p><i>What have we learned?</i></p> 
<p><i>What are we pleased about?</i></p> 	<p><i>What are we concerned about?</i></p> 

  
*What do we need to do next?*



## Appendix F: Tips for parents and carers

### *Introduction*

School can be a very stressful place for children and young people, though most are able to cope with this. However, for a small number, negative emotions relating to school result in difficulties with attendance and occasionally long periods of absence. This can sometimes be known as Emotionally Based School Avoidance ('EBSA').

Children and young people may have negative feelings about attending school for different reasons such as:

- They may be experiencing anxiety about specific aspects of school
- Social situations and communicating with others can be challenging
- There may be difficulties in adjusting to changing school, year group or class
- Children and young people can worry about academic pressures or finding work difficult
- It can be difficult for children and young people to concentrate due to other stressful things in their life

EBSA is a sign of emotional difficulties and can be stressful for you and your son/daughter. Pressures on increasing attendance can make things more difficult. Therefore, a team approach that focuses on making individualised adjustments to your child's routines and creating manageable goals to meet their needs, is vital to supporting your child at home and at school. This will help rebuild your child's feelings of safety, confidence and self-esteem.

### *Signs of negative feelings about school*

It is important that we notice the warning signs for a child experiencing negative feelings about attending school, which may lead to EBSA, early on. This means we can put support systems in place at the initial stages and increase our chances of success. It may be quite difficult to notice a child's anxiety about attending school, as they may internalise their negative feelings, making them hard to see. We must be mindful of this possible internalisation. Sometimes, this inner-emotional distress can manifest into more obvious and visible externalising behaviours, particularly if a child or young person is desperately seeking to avoid school.

Here are some of the signs and symptoms a child experiencing negative feelings about school, which could lead to EBSA, may demonstrate. However, this list is not exhaustive and, as a parent, you know your child best. Therefore, it is important you voice any concerns you may have about your child, and discuss any changes in behaviour that you are worried about with your child's teacher or school.

- Patterns in absences/expressions of not wanting to attend school e.g. not wanting to attend school on a Wednesday morning
- Seeming reluctant to leave home on school days
- Voicing their concerns about school
- Overly worrying about people in the family
- Increase of complaints about physical symptoms e.g. tummy ache, head ache that don't appear to have a medical cause (always check with the GP)
- Crying
- Becoming argumentative
- Sleep difficulties on school nights
- Not wanting to get ready for school



- 'Exploding' when they get home from school
- Withdrawing – appearing quiet, low, tearful
- Symptoms appearing worse after school holidays/weekends
- Becoming clingy and needy to parent/carer

### *Tips for supporting your son/daughter*

If you feel your son/daughter is experiencing negative feelings about attending school, here are some things you can do:

**Discuss** – speak as soon as possible with your child's school about the concerns you have. It is important that your communication with school is consistent and often so you can work together to improve your child's situation and make appropriate changes.

**Consider** – thinking about the WHY is a step towards knowing what we can do to help:

- Have there been any significant life stressors that your child has experienced? e.g. bereavement, separation/divorce, illness (family member or child)
- Is your child experiencing bullying, or are they experiencing difficulties in forming/maintaining peer relationships?
- Does your child have any additional needs? E.g. Autism, Dyslexia
- Might your son/daughter be experiencing anxiety?
- Has your child experienced trauma?
- Does your child appear to struggle with particular school subjects or activities?

**Listen** – listen to your child's worries. Ask them what worries them. Try to find out from their perspective what is bothering them about attending school. Using visual supports may help your child to explain the problem. Or, asking your child to rate different events/places in school from 'stressful' to 'not stressful' could give you an indication of the aspects of school that are most worrying to them. Your child's school may be able to help you with this.

**Reassure** – reassure your child you want to help them and that you aren't going to shout or tell them off.

**Diary** – keep track of the days/times that your child does not attend school, or the days/times that they appear most anxious. Keep a record of the things they say/the symptoms they show to help determine if there are any patterns in your child's behaviour.

**Try** – encourage your child to explore different activities that might help reduce their stress and anxiety. This could be watching TV, listening to music, reading a book, exercise, mindfulness, spending time with friends. The Great Dream (right; Action for Happiness) provides ideas of activities to try to help to improve emotional wellbeing.





**Plan** – make a regular routine. This could be a morning routine from waking up, having breakfast, getting dressed, packing their bag, leaving the house, arriving at school. Ensuring this is consistent will give your child much needed predictability and familiarity. Work with school to help create a timetabled routine for their school day.

**Adjust** – it may be necessary to work with school to make your son/daughter's school day less daunting. This could be in the form of a reduced timetable, extra breaks, being met in the playground by a preferred member of staff, having a quiet area for them to go to or reducing academic demands. It is important that you work with your child in a way that works for them. Break things down into manageable steps.

**Positive feedback** – Give positive feedback to your son/daughter when they've made progress, acknowledging even the smallest of efforts made. When we are experiencing negative emotions or anxiety, even the tiniest of steps forward can take a huge amount of effort and commitment, and it is important that we acknowledge how hard our child is trying.

**Review** – Ensure that the support you offer your child, and that which is offered by school is regularly reviewed. Take note of things that work, and things that don't, so you can adapt support.

**Seek** – Consider seeking help or support from one of the organisations detailed below if you feel you need further support.

*Tips for supporting your child to reduce anxiety about school*

The following strategies may be helpful in supporting your son or daughter to manage any worries they have about school, and to reduce signs and symptoms of anxiety that they experience.

**Noticing their worries** – with their age in mind, think about ways that your child might identify and capture their worries: having these recorded or noted in some form can really help them to feel more manageable. For primary school aged children, this might involve using a Worry Monster. Your child, perhaps with your support, will write/draw their worries down on slips of paper, zipping them into the mouth of the Worry Monster to 'look after' for them. With the Worry Monster responsible for the worries, the child is encouraged to leave their concerns behind. It is recommended that parents remove the worries at regular intervals. For teenagers, a worry journal might be a useful approach. Writing on a daily basis is known to help us clarify our thinking and to find difficult thoughts more manageable. Your child should be encouraged to spend 10-15 minutes writing down (or drawing/recording in another format) their worries, allowing their thoughts to leave their mind and be held on the page. Whatever their age, it can be helpful to designate a set 'worry time' each day, when their concerns will be explored, encouraging any thoughts about concerns or worrying to take place in this time rather than spilling into the rest of their day.



**Creating a 'calm kit'** – with your son or daughter, fill a box or bag with items that they find soothing or calming. Perhaps activities that help them to find calm (e.g. mindful colouring books, music) or comforting objects (e.g. photos of happy memories, favourite toys). For some children, certain fabrics and textures will be soothing and so these could be



included. At difficult times, encourage your child to access their calming box or bag, exploring the items to find things that help them to calm on that day.

**Using a transitional object** – this might be a photo or small object that your child takes with them into school, or to other situations that they find challenging. Perhaps a friendship bracelet or note from a parent or trusted adult, a photo of a pet, or a hankie with mum/dad's perfume or aftershave. These items can bring comfort and reassurance when things are feeling tough.

**Carrying out calming activities** – practicing calming activities at home can help to increase your son/daughter's inner calm, and can leave them feeling better equipped to face the challenges that life brings. Known to have a calming effect on the nervous system (therefore helping us to feel more grounded and in control), activities such as yoga and mindfulness can bring many benefits, both in the moment and in day to day life more generally. The Teen Yoga Foundation can be accessed here:



[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCW56cm0SXozQzVH3GNn6t8A?view\\_as=subscriber](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCW56cm0SXozQzVH3GNn6t8A?view_as=subscriber)  
For mindfulness activities for CYP, try: <http://mindfulnessforteens.com/resources/>

**Using breathing techniques** – these can help to slow our heart rate, and bring our nervous system under control. They can be particularly helpful in the moment where we feel anxious or worried (if practiced) but can be helpful at increasing our general sense of wellness at other times too. Try supporting your son or daughter with 'Square Breathing': Look for a square in the room you are sitting in, or imagine one in your mind. You are going to draw an imaginary line around the square. As you draw along the top of the square, breathe in to a count of 3, as you draw down the side of the square, hold that breath for the count of 3. Along the bottom of the square breathe out to a count of 3 and then hold for 3 as you draw up the last side. Repeat this ten times.

'Strawberry Cake' breathing can also work well, particularly for younger children: breathe slowly in through your nose (smell the strawberry) and gently out through the mouth (blow out the candles). Whilst you're doing this, say this phrase in your head "smell the strawberries and blow out the candles". Try also breathing out slowly and gently so that the flames flicker.

#### *Take Care of Yourself*

As well as supporting your child, it is also very important you look after yourself. Think of the reminder we hear when taking a flight: "put your own oxygen mask on first". Your child will be able to pick up on your anxiety and stress, so keeping yourself mentally well will also help your child. Seek support from your own friends and family, ensure you find things to do that relieve you of anxiety, and speak to your employer who may be able to offer flexible working.

Please see The Great Dream as above; this can be a helpful reminder for all of us in ways to improve our own wellbeing.

#### *Other sources of support:*

- Visit [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk), where you can find a range of resources to support your child's mental health. In particular, their pages on supporting children and young people with school anxiety are worth a look: <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help-for-parents/parents-guide-to-support-a-z/parents-guide-to-support-school-anxiety-and-refusal/>





- Visit <https://copingskillsforkids.com/calming-anxiety> for calming activities that you and your child can do at home.
- Visit <https://mindedforfamilies.org.uk/young-people/> for advice about young people's mental health.
- Visit <https://www.actionforhappiness.org/> for other ways you can take action to increase your child's happiness.
- Visit <https://www.autism.org.uk/> for advice if your child has, or is suspected to have ASC.
- Visit <https://notfineinschool.org.uk/> which is a parent-led organisation that offers peer support to families, shares informative resources and raises awareness of EBSA experiences.
- West Berkshire Educational Psychology Service have produced a "Wellbeing and Recovery Guidance" document in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This features a range of activities that may be used in supporting children and young people as they return to school. Ask your child's school for a copy of the parent version.
- Remember, your child's GP may be able to offer advice or support, particularly in relation to early signs of anxiety or low mood, sleep difficulties, or in relation to physical complaints that you feel may be associated with anxiety.
- Speak with your son/daughter's school about other teams in the local authority who may be able to help (for example, the Mental Health Support Team), or for external services such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).



## Appendix G: Tips for children

### What to do when you're worried about school – tips for children

For some children, school can sometimes feel like a hard place to be. You might be worried about all sorts of things like:

- Leaving your family
- Your friendships
- School work feeling too difficult
- Different places in school feeling uncomfortable

Or there might be other things worrying you as well. When we are worried about school, or have uncomfortable feelings about being in school, we can sometimes feel like we don't want to go. However, whilst not going into school may make us feel better on that day, in the longer term, it makes it much harder for us to go back. It is important instead that we find ways of making school feel okay.

The first step to finding ways to cope is to talk to an adult you trust: maybe a parent or family member, or perhaps a teacher in school that you get on well with. Tell them that you are finding school difficult, and that it is leaving you with difficult feelings.

There are also some practical things that you can try that might help you to feel better about going to school. Here are some examples:

**Let your feelings out** - you could do this by keeping a diary or journal about how you're feeling – or by drawing pictures if you'd prefer. Letting our feelings out can help our worries to feel smaller. You might also like to write down some of the things you're looking forward to in school, and some of the things you enjoy when you are there.

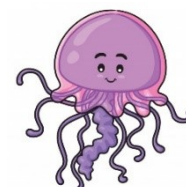


**Try a breathing exercise** - these can sometimes help us to feel better by slowing our heart rate down. We like this one called “Strawberry Cake”: breathe slowly in through your nose (smell the strawberry) and gently out through the mouth (blow out the candles). Whilst you're doing this, say this phrase in your head “smell the strawberries and blow out the candles”. Try also breathing out slowly and gently so that the flames flicker.



**Use a stress ball** - take a stress ball in one or both of your hands. Squeeze and then release it. Experiment with different ways of squeezing the ball to see which you like best (for example, different speeds, tensions and so on). This exercise will help release muscle tension and will give you a hand massage at the same time.

**Robot/jellyfish/tower movements** - find some space in school and pretend to move like a robot, a jellyfish or a tower. These will all feel different in your body; e.g., you are likely to feel more tension in your body as a robot or a tower, but a jellyfish will feel floppy and relaxed. Try and focus on keeping that jellyfish feeling, with your muscles nice and relaxed and your body free of tension.



**Make a calm picture to have with you** - this might have things you have drawn, or pictures and words cut out from magazines – all things that help you to feel calm and happy. Keep this picture in your school bag so that you can look at it if you're feeling worried or unhappy in school.



## Appendix H: Tips for teenagers

### What to do when you're worried about school – tips for teenagers

For some young people, school can sometimes feel like a tough place to be. All sorts of things can feel challenging, or can leave you feeling worried. For example:

- Issues with friends or other young people
- Academic pressures
- The school environment feeling uncomfortable
- Worries about things at home or being away from your family

There are lots of other things you might be concerned about too – we are all different and experience things in different ways. When you have negative feelings about school, not going to school can sometimes feel like the easiest option. However, whilst this might bring short term relief, it can make things much harder in the long term, and can make it really difficult to go back to school. It is important instead to try and find ways of managing school life on a day to day basis.

In the first instance, you may find it really helpful to share how you are feeling. Speak to a trusted adult in your family, or to a school staff member you get on well with. Let them know you're finding things tough with school. The more information you can give about how you're feeling, the more they are likely to be able to help you.

There are also lots of things that you can do that can help school to feel more manageable. Here are some examples:

**Let your feelings out** - keeping a diary or journal about how you are feeling can help you to process your feelings and notice patterns in the things that can be worrying. Just getting things down on paper can help us to organise our thoughts and make sense of them: often our worries can seem smaller. If writing is not your thing, you might find drawing or getting creative a good alternative.

**Try a breathing exercise** - these work by helping our central nervous system to take back control when we're feeling worried or anxious; slowing our breath helps our other bodily anxiety responses to slow down. "Square Breathing" can be effective. Look for a square in the room you are sitting in, or imagine one in your mind. You are going to draw an imaginary line around the square. As you draw along the top of the square, breathe in to a count of 3, as you draw down the side of the square, hold that breath for the count of 3. Along the bottom of the square breathe out to a count of 3 and then hold for 3 as you draw up the last side. Repeat this ten times.



**Use mindfulness** - mindfulness can help us to stay in the moment, and to accept our feelings. Using your senses think about your environment. What can you see? What can you hear? What can you smell? What can you touch? Try to push all other thoughts out of your mind as you focus on these factors. If other thoughts begin to invade your thinking, gently push them away and return to your senses.





**Deep pressure activities** - these can help us to release muscle tension and find our inner calm. An example is hand massage. Use your thumb and fingers from one hand to massage your other hand. Begin with your palm and work outwards along each of your fingers. Try different pressures and types of massage to see which you prefer. Take your time and try to focus your thinking on the sensation (pushing away other thoughts).



**Create a calm picture** - this may be a drawing or collage, perhaps a collection of images and words you have cut from magazines or websites. Create a picture that helps you to feel calm and content. Carry this with you in your school bag, or perhaps have a photo of it on your phone. Look back at it when you need to find some calm as you go about your day to day activities.

**Ensure you practice regular self-care** - self-care activities are those we can do on a day to day basis that improve our overall sense of emotional wellbeing. They should be easy to achieve, and are likely to be different for different people, depending on our own preferences. They can be as simple as having a cup of tea in the garden, or could be more involved such as watching something on the television, or taking part in a social activity. The Anna Freud website has lots of self-care ideas: <https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/self-care/>

**Three things to do each day** - try to think about incorporating the following into your day to day life:

- **Something that helps you to relax**
- **Something creative**
- **Something physically active**

Even if it's just for five minutes a day, these activities can have a big impact on your emotional wellbeing.



For further ideas, speak to a member of staff in school who may be able to give you some suggestions taken from the West Berkshire Educational Psychology Service Wellbeing and Recovery Guidance (Secondary School version).



## Appendix I: Tips for teachers

### Tips for Classroom Teachers supporting children and young people experiencing EBSA

Understanding the best ways to support children and young people (CYP) who are experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) can feel challenging. As a classroom teacher you may be left wondering the best things to say or do to support the CYP to feel most comfortable in school, and to maintain the progress that they are hopefully making in engaging in increasing amounts of school-based education. It should firstly be noted that CYP experiencing EBSA will often have a Therapeutic Plan. This Plan will denote, in detail, the specific ways of supporting them. When thinking about a pupil in your class it is recommended that, as a first step, you find out if a Therapeutic Plan is in place, and review the information contained within.

With the Therapeutic Plan in mind, the following considerations may be helpful:

#### *Approaches to supporting CYP:*

- Adopt a calm, positive and welcoming approach. Communicate through your words, body language (smiles, open body language etc.) and behaviour that you are pleased to have the CYP in school and in your lesson.
- Accept CYP back into class without asking questions or drawing attention to their absence.
- Relationships are key. Try to foster a positive and supportive relationship with the affected CYP. Authoritative classroom management approaches are likely to be most effective, and will see you showing a high level of warmth, acceptance and nurturance, communicating openly, and using a gentle guiding approach to letting CYP know what is expected.
- Aim for a sense of normality, promote consistency and routine. Knowing what to expect is reassuring for CYP.
- Provide positive feedback about the prosocial behaviours demonstrated by the CYP. For example, they may be attentively engaging in a task, or discussing an idea with a peer (“it’s great to see you talking your ideas over with your neighbour, that will really help you understand the topic!”)
- Keep in touch with CYP when they are not able to access class. This may be face to face (in or out of school), by phone, email or by letters home.

#### *Support their interactions with peers:*

- With the input of the CYP and those supporting them, consider whether it might be helpful to brief their class before their return. Think about what information might be communicated about their absence, and about the types of things classmates may be prompted to do. For example, classmates should focus on being welcoming and supportive whilst working to create a sense of normality, and on avoiding asking questions about the CYP’s absence.
- Think about whether a buddy system might be helpful. This might involve identifying one or two pupils to act as key, supportive links between the affected CYP and their classmates, for example by supporting them to join in with social activities at break times. West Berkshire EPS can also support with the use of the Circle of Friends intervention as a possible alternative to this, if identified as a helpful intervention.
- If the CYP is not able to access class, consider setting up ‘pen pal’ type arrangements with trusted peers in class, and social activities if possible. This will help to maintain relationships.



*Promoting access to academic work:*

- Classwork should be achievable and appropriately differentiated according to the level the CYP is currently working at. Remember that CYP may quickly move from feeling comfortably stretched and engaged to overwhelmed and anxious.
- Ensure that school work is available and accessible for CYP who are unable to attend lessons, even if this is at short notice.
- Let CYP know that there isn't an expectation for them to 'catch-up' work missed through their absences.

*Key information to look for in a Therapeutic Plan:*

- *The current plan:* What are the expectations this week for this CYP's engagement in school? Although the CYP may be back in class, there may be specific plans about how long they will spend in school, which lessons they will attend, and about support that is available to them during their time in school. Ensure you have an up to date understanding of this and support the CYP to follow the plan (even if things are going well and you feel they may be able to do more on a particular day).
- *Signs that support is needed:* Ensure you are aware of the signs that a CYP is experiencing increased anxiety in the classroom. It may be helpful to agree a signal that the CYP can proactively use to communicate to you when they need help.
- *Responding to overwhelming feelings:* Work with the CYP to create a plan to respond to times where things feel too difficult. What is their support in school and how will they access this?
- *Scripted language:* With the team around the CYP, support the use of scripts to manage school life. These may be helpful to the CYP when:
  - Communicating feelings about an activity or situation
  - Seeking help in school
  - Explaining absences to peers

Understanding EBSA, for example in terms of contributory factors and the research relating to risk and resilience, can help you to feel more informed and equipped ready to support CYP affected by this issue. You may find it helpful to refer to the initial section of this guidance document, which gives an overview of current research and theories relating to EBSA. The following section in the guidance will additionally give you an overview of the approach recommended by West Berkshire EPS for supporting CYP experiencing EBSA.

(Adapted from Babcock LDP EPS Guidance, 2020)





## Appendix J: EBSA Therapeutic Plan template

### Therapeutic Plan for supporting children and young people experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance

Use the template below to bring together the information gathered through your assessments to date, which will incorporate the views of the child or young person (CYP) affected by Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), their parents/carers, school staff, and others involved in their support at this time. This template plan is largely based upon the standard Therapeutic Plan used in West Berkshire, which is designed to promote prosocial feelings and to support CYP with antisocial experiences and feelings. It aims to provide space for the incorporation of risk assessment measures when used alongside the Therapeutic Thinking Plan Overview tool (which assesses risk). However, in this template, additional subheadings and examples have been included to demonstrate how this plan may be used in preparing to support CYP experiencing EBSA to return to school.

The aim of all Therapeutic Plans is to provide all those supporting a CYP with clear guidance about what to do, when and how, in order to provide the most effective support. It can be thought of as a 'job description' for staff, and should be clear and easy to understand, whilst thorough in the level of detail given.

In the template which follows, it is suggested that the standard and bold text is retained to support the reader in navigating the detail. The text in italics may be deleted as it serves the purpose of supporting the person(s) writing the plan to understand the content that may appear in each section.



**Therapeutic Plan**

<b>Name:</b>	<b>DOB:</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Review Date:</b>
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*N.B. in EBSA cases, plans should be reviewed and adjusted frequently (every 3-4 weeks). With the CYP as a key contributor, strengths and challenges to date should be considered.*

<b>Photo</b>	<p><b>Which tools have been used to inform this plan?</b>  <i>(e.g. WBEPS Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) Guidance Information Gathering Tool, Anxiety Mapping, Therapeutic Tree)</i></p> <p><b>Why is this plan being created?</b>  <i>Brief overview of the current situation and relevant recent history. It may be helpful to cross-reference to information gathering tools used and their findings.</i></p> <p><b>Risk level identified at completion of initial Therapeutic Plan Overview:</b>  <b>Risk level identified following creation of Therapeutic Plan:</b>  <b>Does the child/young person require a Personal Evacuation Plan?</b> If so, has this been created/where is it located?</p> <p><b>Are there any other documents that should be consulted in conjunction with this Therapeutic Plan?</b> (e.g. School Health and Safety Policy, Staff Wellbeing Policy)</p>
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**Differentiated measures to support XXX**

To support XXX to experience lower anxiety and to create pro-social experiences, feelings and behaviours, it is important that we make some changes to his/her school day, differentiating it from that of his/her peers.

*Considerations:*

- *Support that may be offered to XXX and their family in order to support positive home routines around school life. Who might be involved in this? What might it look like? Example: phone call from a staff member on a Monday morning to check in with pupil on the phone before they come into school.*
- *A graduated approach to increasing XXX’s attendance in school following a period of non-attendance (which may be understood as EBSA). Consider using a laddered approach whereby the easiest goals are worked towards first, building up, over time, to more challenging parts of school life.*
- *Steps of progress may be small and slow. For example, the first weeks may be focussed upon the journey to and from school, and stepping back onto the school site for the first time. Take things slowly, and accept set-backs as these occur.*



*Example template that may be used for structuring a graduated approach:*

<b>Week</b>	<b>Activity/period of time in school</b>	<b>Differentiated measures</b>
Week One		<i>Group dynamics? Small garden approach? Where/when/how                      School environments accessed? Changes needed (e.g. access to areas that raise anxiety levels)                      Curriculum and timetable                      Beginning and ending of day                      Plans around break times                      Moving around the school site                      Safe spaces and key staff and peers                      What if.... Is there a plan for foreseeable changes that might arise? For example, sickness of a key member of staff.</i>
Week Two		
Week Three		
Week Four		
Continue as needed		



*Please refer to graduated response guidance, and top tips for parents and schools for further suggestions of things that may help. However, please note that, in light of the individual circumstances of CYP, creative solutions will be needed that respond to the CYP's specific needs.*

**Differentiated experiences and additional strategies to support XXX:**

These are other strategies that XXX's school will use to support him/her to have positive experiences, which will lead to positive feelings and pro-social behaviour.

*For CYP experiencing EBSA, it can be helpful to think in terms of the specific support they may need to overcome the factors contributing to their feelings about school. For example, support related to anxiety, or to developing the social communication skills needed to more comfortably access the school social environment.*

Pro social/positive behaviour	Strategies to respond
<p>Behaviours we would like to see:</p> <p><i>Examples relating to EBSA:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>XXX will enter the school building, through the side entrance, by 9.10am each day.</i></li> <li>• <i>XXX will feel comfortable to participate in a daily English lesson.</i></li> <li>• <i>XXX will share their concerns about lunchtimes with a key staff member.</i></li> </ul>	<p>Ways that we will respond when XXX behaves in these ways:</p> <p><i>Example response:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Staff working with XXX will give positive feedback about their behaviour using the script "well done XXX, you came in to school at the agreed time, ready to start your work. That means that we can help you to get the most from your lesson today."</i></li> </ul>



<p><b>Anxiety, antisocial difficult behaviours</b></p> <p><i>Consider:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Have we worked with the child/young person to understand more about the times where they experience anxiety or where antisocial behaviours emerge?</i></li> <li>• <i>Are all of the child/young person's anxiety, anti-social or difficult behaviours reflective of the same level of dysregulation? Is it necessary to differentiate between low and higher level anxiety behaviours, for example.</i></li> <li>• <i>If so, how do staff recognise behaviours at each stage?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is a rating scale needed?</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Strategies to respond</b></p> <p><i>Consider:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Are differentiated responses needed according to the level of anxiety shown? Has the child/young person been involved in discussions to plan responses?</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Crisis, antisocial dangerous behaviours</b></p> <p><i>As above</i></p>	<p><b>Strategies to respond</b></p> <p><i>As above</i></p>



### **Post incident recovery and therapeutic debrief**

Following a difficult incident, it is important to spend time recovering and debriefing with XXX, ensuring that relationships with staff can be repaired in a way that leaves XXX experiencing prosocial feelings and which promotes their continued progress in increasing their school attendance.

In response to incidents where XXX has displayed **low level anxiety behaviours**, the post incident response will be differentiated according to his/her level of anxiety, but will be broadly as follows:

Recovery period:

Debrief:

In response to incidents where XXX has displayed **high level anxiety behaviours**, the post incident response will be as follows:

Recovery period:

Debrief:

#### **Tools that might be helpful:**

- *E.g. Comic Strip Conversations – how/when might these be used?*



**Signature of Plan Co-ordinator..... Date .....**

**Signature of Headteacher.....Date.....**

**Signature of Parent / Carer..... Date .....**

**Signature of Young Person.....Date.....**



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